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Media Release

Ailing rural medical services get life-saving skills injection

Farming communities in rural Queensland are feeling a lot better – and healthier.

With the news the National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) has joined Queensland Rural Medical Education (QRME) to provide bush doctors with specialist training in agricultural health and wellbeing.

NCFH director Sue Brumby says the multidisciplinary Agricultural Health and Medicine unit provides continuous professional education for doctors, students and other rural health professionals training to work in rural Queensland.

Clinical Associate Professor Brumby says the Queensland curriculum will be closely aligned with components of a graduate certificate developed by NCFH and delivered through Deakin University School of Medicine. Professor Brendan Crotty, head of the Deakin Medical School, said, “I am delighted that the program has been taken up by QRME. We hope that other rural communities will follow Queensland’s lead.”

She says providing this education through QRME will assist with integrating this important field of knowledge into Queensland rural training programs and encourage health practitioners, including rural nurses, practice managers, allied health practitioners, pharmacists, veterinarians and GPs to broaden their knowledge and skills.

“Rates of injury and illness in farmers are among the highest of any industrial group in Australia,” she says. “Compounding the high injury rates are the underlying poor physical and mental health indicators in farming communities.”

QRME Medical Director Professor Scott Kitchener says the Agricultural Health and Medicine unit is “innovative and different, not just for Queensland but for the whole country”.

Professor Kitchener says “with QRME covering all sub-tropical rural Queensland as a regional training provider the ability to integrate a course such as this into its delivery is “an exciting opportunity”.

“One of our key roles is to deliver continuous professional development for both registrars and doctors, and especially for rurally-based doctors,” Professor Kitchener says.

Dr. Andrew Reedy, Medical Superintendent at Millmerran Health Services on the Darling Downs, and Chair of QRME added that “Medical practice in rural communities is vital in meeting the health care concerns of farmers, but little is said of the cultural competency in agricultural health and medicine”. He went on to say: “Importantly poor farmer health may be improved with early intervention and ongoing health maintenance, providing flow-on benefits through reduced health expenditure, improved farm profitability and more sustainable rural communities.”

“The NCFH course has really indentified this gap and pinned it down”.

“Effective translational and multidisciplinary approaches are needed to decrease the separation of farmers and their health care providers”.

“General practitioners and health care practitioners who serve the agricultural and farming communities can make a difference if provided with the necessary skills, knowledge and support.”

Professor Kitchener says participating doctors, nurses, vets, allied health professionals and agriculturalists will have the opportunity to learn together at QRME’s Toowoomba base in January 2012.

Those who wish to gain credit for the university course can enrol through Deakin University and save on all the travel costs.

QRME is dedicated to offering a training program encompassing high standards and innovation in a friendly and professional atmosphere.

“Our general practice training program is GP registrar focused, preparing GP registrars for a range of GP situations with an emphasis on rural medicine,” he says.

“The Agricultural Health and Medicine Education Integration Project will increase understanding of clinical, physical and mental health factors that result in higher rates of injury, illness and death in rural farming communities and enhance rural practitioners’ abilities to address these issues in their clinical practice.”

And that is good news for everybody he said.

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