

Community health project

FARMERS in the Esperance region had a chance to participate in a community health project recently, with the running of the Sustainable Farm Families program.

The program started last year when two Victorian doctors – Dr Stuart Willder and Dr Geoff Bartlett – gained funding to expand the program they started in rural Victoria into a remote, rural location in WA.

Program facilitator Dale Rooney said that the doctors studied the demographics of several rural towns in WA and chose Esperance as the location.

"We were perfect for the criteria they were looking for in that we have a lot of broadacre farming, we're a remote site and we've got just about the right population," Mrs Rooney said.

The two sessions held in

Cascade and Esperance late last week were follow up sessions to workshops held this time last year, and were run by Willder and Bartlett with help from Esperance Community Health Service representatives Marg Carmody, Val Lane and Kylie Ryan.

"In the initial session (in 2007), Stuart and Geoff gave all the attendees physicals, looking at things like blood pressure, blood glucose levels and moles.

"This was essentially a follow up session to see where those levels were at, and for the most part they had improved.

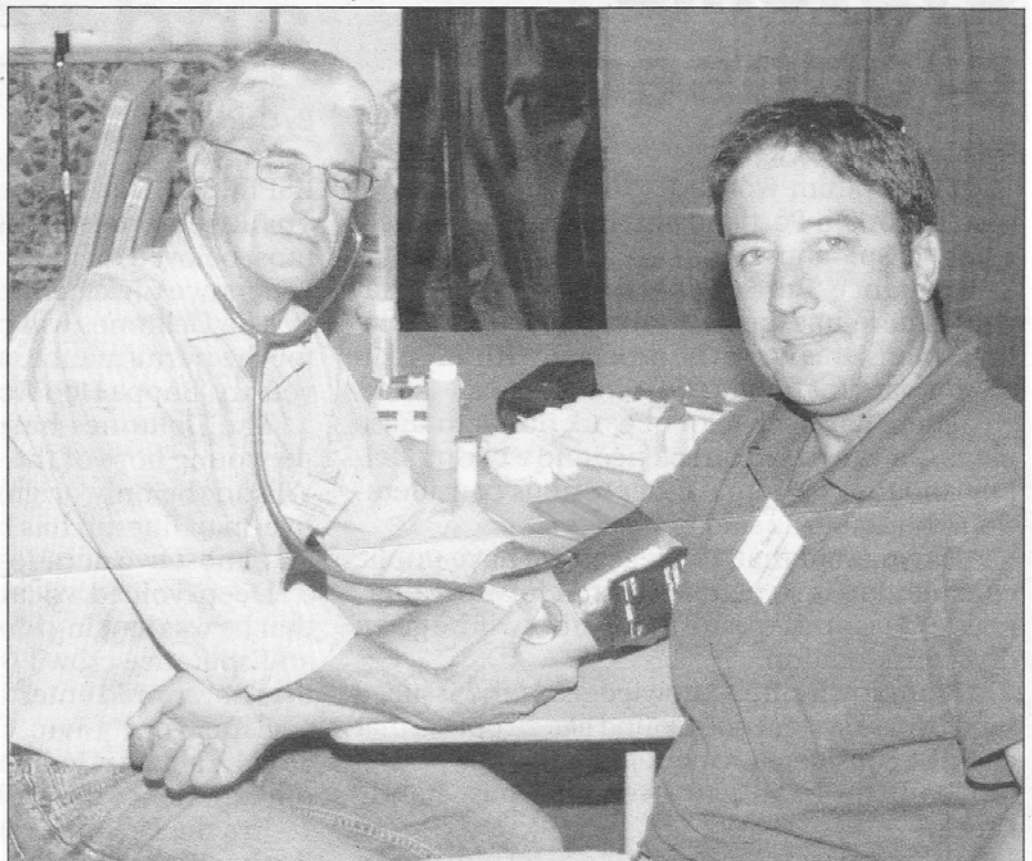
"Part of the program was also to upskill local health professionals so they can hopefully run the project next year, because obviously funding only goes so far."

The project will now need to be picked up by the Esperance Community Health Service if it is to continue next year, and Mrs Rooney said she was extremely hopeful Community Health would take up the challenge.

"It's an extremely beneficial program, because it deals with physical and mental health issues, and sometimes it's hard to get farmers along to these things.

"In this instance, the feedback we have had is fantastic ... one farmer from Cascade said he thinks it should be mandatory for all farmers.

"Essentially we need Esperance Community Health to run the program, and it's a matter of being able to find the time, but to get 30 farmers along is a good indication that it is worth the time."



LOCAL farmer Chris Siemer has his blood pressure checked by Victorian doctor Geoff Bartlett as part of the Sustainable Farm Families program.