

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Students launched from medical school into the real world

UTAS second year medical students will gain first-hand experience of healthcare in rural communities across the state next week as they leave Hobart and head to the country as part of the Rural Communities Program (April 11-15).

Now in its third year, the Rural Communities Program gives students a taste of the many positive aspects of living and working in a rural community.

Communities span the North West, northern Tasmania, Flinders Island, Queenstown, the central highlands, southern midlands, Derwent Valley, Huon Valley and the East Coast.

Director of Medical Education Professor Craig Zimitat said communities are enthusiastic about engaging students, rural health professionals and community members.

“Four new communities joined the program this year and we hope the program will grow and build stronger partnerships between the School of Medicine and rural communities,” he said.

“We also want students to develop ongoing relationships with the community they visit.”

The Rural Communities Program aims to give medical students a deeper knowledge of the health needs and culture of Tasmania’s rural communities, first-hand experience of the roles of various health professionals working in rural areas and a broad appreciation of the inter-professional nature of health care.

“It provides a small groups of 4-10 medical students with a residential experience in a rural community where they actively engage with the community to understand the health care landscape of the community, particularly in terms of the issues affecting their health, service gaps and the informal and formal networks of care supporting individuals, families and the community,” Prof. Zimitat said.

“Past students have said that the experience reminded them of why they wanted to practice medicine, and many have returned to their community for their general practice placement in third year.”

During the week students will:

- Interact with local health professionals, patients and community leaders;
- Attend community events, for example with Rotary or Lions;
- Do ward rounds, for example in Deloraine, Scottsdale, and clinical skills training (Rural Clinical School, Burnie);
- Visit aged care facilities (Swansea, Nubeena);
- Engage in health promotion activities (e.g. Pit-stop in Triabunna, CORES Suicide Prevention program in Sheffield and Ouse), paramedic call outs and Aboriginal health;
- Learn about the impacts of discrimination and bullying on health.

Prof. Zimitat said the week is not all about hard work; students are encouraged to spend time relaxing and enjoying the benefits of rural lifestyle in their host community, such as caving at Westbury and wine tasting on Flinders Island.

The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing supports medical students to spend at least four weeks of their degree in a rural area to gain practical insights into health and health care in rural communities.

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