

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Out of medical school and into the real world

Second-year UTAS medical students will gain first-hand experience of healthcare in rural communities across the Tasmania next week, as they leave Hobart and head to the country as part of the Rural Communities Program (April 30-May 4, 2012).

Developed by Professor Craig Zimitat and Ms Alison Miles, and now in its fourth year, the program exposes students to the many positive aspects of living and working in a rural community.

UTAS has found communities are enthusiastic about extending opportunities to engage students, rural health professionals and community members.

It is hoped that the program will grow and build stronger partnerships between the School of Medicine and rural communities, and that students will develop ongoing relationships with their community.

Four new communities joined the program this year. The complete list of communities involved is:

North West – Smithton, Wynyard, Ulverstone, Latrobe, Sheffield,
Northern Tasmania – Westbury/Deloraine
West Coast: Queenstown,
Central Highlands - Ouse,
Derwent Valley- New Norfolk
Huon Valley – Huonville, Geeveston, Snug, Bruny Island
East Coast – Swansea, Triabunna.

Director of Medical Education Professor Craig Zimitat said students get a glimpse of their futures through the Rural Communities Program.

“During this week they will see the importance of GPs and their relationships with their community, support services and other health professionals,” he said.

“The program provides groups of four-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.

“They begin to understand the issues affecting health, service gaps and how the informal and formal care networks support individuals and families.

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

Students will interact with local health professionals and patients, community leaders and attend community events (for example, with Rotary or Lions).

They will also undertake ward rounds (e.g. Deloraine, Scottsdale), clinical skills training (Rural Clinical School, Burnie), visit aged care facilities (e.g. Swansea, Huon Valley), engage in health promotion activities (e.g. Pit-stop in Triabunna, Heart Foundation walks at Scottsdale) visit community houses, men’s sheds, paramedic call-outs and Aboriginal health, while some learn about the impacts of discrimination and bullying on health.

It’s not all hard yakka though; students are encouraged to spend time relaxing and enjoying the benefits of rural lifestyle in their host community (e.g. caving at Westbury and bushwalking at the Leven Canyon).

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.

For more information, please contact Professor Craig Zimitat, director of medical education, School of Medicine.

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