

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

Date: Monday 3 September 2007

Attention: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Rural Tasmania could learn from Scottish pilot projects in health

Scottish experts are exploring new roles for health professionals to address health workforce shortages in rural areas - research which could hold relevance for Tasmania.

According to Professor Jane Farmer, a Scottish rural health care change expert, there are a number of pilot projects in Scotland in their early stages which could prove useful to Tasmania.

At a Rural Health Week seminar in Campbell Town this afternoon, Prof. Farmer, who is visiting the University Department of Rural Health (UDRH) Tasmania, will share information on projects about new roles in rural health care that are aimed at meeting the challenges facing rural communities and new ways of managing people with chronic conditions involving their local communities.

“Scotland and Tasmania have a lot of things in common with regard to rural health,” she said.

“Both have an ageing population with similar rural populations and health profiles. Both are moving from an acute, reactive and hospital-based focus towards a model of primary, community and self managed care.”

Prof. Farmer said Scotland had just started a pilot program to introduce Physician Assistants to work in rural communities, with this project to be reviewed in about a year’s time.”

Other Scottish approaches that may be relevant for Tasmania, said Prof. Farmer, include:

- A program set up to identify patients who are most likely to have a crisis in the next six months. An intervention team offers these patients health and social care packages, with an intention to keep them in primary health care for as long as possible;
- A Primary Care Collaborative project which aims to skill up nurses in primary care on diabetes and heart disease treatments.

“These two long-term conditions are highest among our population,” Prof. Farmer said. “Again, the objective is to keep people in primary health care as far as possible. These nurses are also responsible for educating people at risk.”

During her Tasmanian visit, Prof. Farmer is undertaking a comparative study between Tasmania and Scotland to investigate the roles of rural community health professionals in generating social outcomes.

She will interview health professionals practising in rural areas and key community members knowledgeable about community activities such as teachers, clergies, shopkeepers or local council members. The UDRH is recruiting volunteers for the interviews.

People interested in Prof. Farmer’s research study should contact Cecilia Chiu on 6324 4028 or email: Cecilia.Chiu@utas.edu.au.

For interviews and further information:

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Biography of Professor Jane Farmer

Professor **Jane Farmer** is **Professor of Rural Health Policy & Management, University of the Highlands & Islands (UHI) Millennium Institute**, Scotland and UHI Millennium Institute Chair of Rural Health Policy and Management. Jane has a background in information science, management and health services research. She has worked as an academic in all three of these disciplinary areas.

Jane has also worked in local government and the health service. She has written extensively on the social and managerial aspects of rural healthcare provision and specialises in rural/urban and international comparative work utilising mixed research methods.

She has had visiting fellowships within rural healthcare to Australia, South Africa and Japan. Her work has considered rural/urban differences in public expectations of health services, patient demand and approaches to health care and the work of healthcare teams. This work has led to a strong interest around the role of health and other services in rural communities in an era of changing demography, globalisation and environmental concerns.

Jane's current work is focused strongly on rural healthcare redesign - with a concern to increase, rather than deplete, rural community capacity - and bringing together healthcare stakeholders (public, patients, health professionals, managers and policymakers) in redesign decisions.

Jane's current areas of interest are: innovative ways of providing healthcare, teamwork, involving communities, the role of technologies in redesign, future rural services for older people and maternity care. Current projects include: EU comparative project on older people's views on the future of rural health services; EU comparative project on developing social enterprise for rural older people's services; NHS Education for Scotland funded Evaluation of Physician Assistants initiative; local enterprise company funded study of the role of health services in rural community sustainability.