

MEDIA RELEASE

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Future doctors set to experience rural life

Medical students will get to experience rural life first-hand and gain insight into healthcare realities when they take part in the rural immersion program next year.

From Tuesday 12 to Friday 15 March 2024, 240 medical students will be visiting 14 rural towns, not just to learn about the joys and challenges of being a rural doctor, but also to experience the warmth of community and country hospitality.

The program has shown by providing rural immersion opportunities early in their degree, students are more likely to explore rural career opportunities and have a better understanding of treating rural patients.

A vital part of the program is staying with local hosts which allows students to experience the true local way of life, rather than just being a visitor to the town.

University of Notre Dame Professor Donna Mak, who was instrumental in developing the immersion program, said she was proud of the difference the program was making to rural communities.

"All doctors need to look after people from the country and need to understand the lives of people from there," Prof Mak said.

"People feel more comfortable sharing their life experiences in their own home, and the students learn so much through conversations and connection with their host families."

Curtin University Senior Lecturer Dr Annett Nyaradi said many students had formed lasting relationships with their hosts, and a number of host family members had been inspired to study at university after having the students visit year after year.

"Our students are blown away by the warmth of welcome and hospitality they receive from their hosts" Dr Nyaradi said.

"The rural immersion makes a lasting impression on the students, and in turn gives them a better understanding of treating rural patients."

The program also opens students up to considering rural training opportunities with the Rural Clinical School WA, and following graduation, internships, and registrar opportunities outside of Perth.

The Universities, in partnership with Rural Health West, Rural Clinical School WA, Wheatbelt East Regional Organisation of Councils and the local Shires, are developing an itinerary of activities for the students to meet with local health professionals, visit local schools, farms and businesses to learn about the challenges and highlights of a rural lifestyle.



Rural Health West has been working with the Universities to assist coordinate the program since 2018.

Rural Health West deputy chief executive officer Kelli Porter said without exposure to rural life and the huge contribution a doctor can make to a rural community, it was not possible for medical students to consider the opportunities of training or working in rural WA in the future.

“For those who continue with a career in Perth, at a minimum they will gain understanding and empathy to treat their patients from rural areas and provide appropriate care,” Mrs Porter said.

“We hope that one day they will return to rural practice if not as a GP, as a locum or visiting specialist.”

This year 120 second-year Curtin medical student groups will be staying in Brookton, Corrigin, Dalwallinu, Katanning, Kondinin, Kulin, Moora, and Wongan Hills.

A similar number of first year Notre Dame medical students will spend the week in Bruce Rock, Cunderdin, Kellerberrin, Merredin, Narrogin, Westonia and Southern Cross.

Rural Health West is looking for hosts for a couple of medical students if you are interested phone 08 6389 4500 or email choosecountry@ruralhealthwest.com.au.

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