

Australia's rural doctors speak up to boost regional health services

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A national study has found that longer rural doctor postings and more rural training positions are needed to provide regional areas with the right doctor, at the right time and in the right place.

Rural doctors, supervisors and trainees took part in The University of Queensland-led study to identify ways to improve [medical services](#) and [physician training](#) for [rural communities](#), which make up 30 per cent of the Australian population.

Head of UQ's Rural Clinical School, Professor Sarah Strasser, said the findings reinforced that rural medicine is a distinct form of practice, and rural physicians and paediatricians in those communities had to do more with different resources.

"We now have data showing that rural physicians have a unique mix of general medicine and sub-specialist skills compared with metropolitan-based physicians," Professor Sarah Strasser said.

"We also found that trainees who spend longer times in rural areas report more positive experiences and greater intention to work rurally.

"Encouraging [trainees](#) to return is reliant on strong leadership, high quality programs and flexibility around family and lifestyle matters."

Professor Strasser said the findings provided specific recommendations for the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) and

government, health services and communities to create a more stable rural general [physician](#) and paediatrician workforce.

"UQ will use the best practice principles identified to help create a basic and advanced regional general physician training program in central and southern Queensland, building on the rural initiatives of the current MD program and any future developments.

The study was a partnership with the Queensland Rural Medical Service (QRMS) and RCAP and drew on data from the Medicine in Australia Balancing Employment and Life (MABEL) survey.

Wide Bay District Director of Clinical Training Associate Professor Steve Flecknoe-Brown said in order for rural practice to grow sustainably, Australia needed more general physicians trained in rural centres, and rural physicians needed a sense of identity and acknowledgement.

"Most physician services in rural areas are currently being delivered by international medical graduates and locums, and they do a great job, but we need more consistency," he said.

"Australia produces among the largest number of medical graduates per capita in the OECD and I'd like to see these graduates work where people need them in the regions, rather than clustering in cities.

Queensland Rural Medical Service Executive Director Dr. Hwee Sin Chong said the study was a step in the right direction for rural medicine.

"This research supports the current investment and direction of our Queensland pathway program, and recognises the value of our regional physician teachers and supervisors," Dr. Chong said.

"It is a welcome contribution to evidence-based research on building and supporting a rural medical workforce."

Provided by University of Queensland

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