

COVID-19

RURAL AND REMOTE RESPONSE

Media release

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“Howdy Pardner”: rural doctors urge tourists to work with them as travel resumes

As travel restrictions are eased across much of Australia, rural doctors are urging visitors to their towns to work with them to ensure the local doctor workforce can continue to provide sustainable health services after what has been a horror year.

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) and Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) say public education is crucial in informing visitors that hospital care in rural areas relies on local GPs being called out of their homes after-hours - not in-house doctors who are at the hospital all the time.

“Many of our colleagues have been ‘through the ringer’ multiple times this year – first with the bushfires, then with COVID-19...and some even with a flood crisis in between!” **Dr Adam Coltzau, Clinical Lead for RDAA and ACRRM’s COVID-19 Rural and Remote Response, said.**

“After what has been an incredibly challenging year for rural doctors and other rural health professionals, many are understandably feeling the onset of fatigue and desperately need some downtime.

“They are also still concerned about COVID-19 coming to their towns, and are doing everything they can to ensure the testing of possible cases is undertaken in the safest possible way, to minimise the risk of infection.

“Those living in rural communities tend to have a really good understanding of the concept of partnering with their local doctor in their healthcare.

“They recognise that if they have to go to the hospital it will likely be one of their local GPs who is called into the hospital to see them, whether that is during the day or late at night.

“Visitors to our towns, however, often come from the city where resident hospital staff are available 24/7...so they assume this same model applies in rural hospitals.

“We want to educate the public about how the rural health system works, how rural doctors are rostered onto hospital duty, and the type of services they might expect at rural hospitals.

“We need them to know that they should absolutely come to the local Emergency Department for anything they are concerned about.

“But if it is clearly something non-urgent that they can get care for during business hours at the local practice, then they should consider that option instead.

“For example, if you are having heart palpitations, you absolutely should come to the hospital.

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“If you need a script for wart killer, however, it is best to consider first going to the local general practice during business hours.

“Just as with local residents, we want visitors to our towns to partner with local doctors and other rural health professionals in their care.

“We want to ensure they get the most appropriate care for their health concern...while also helping to prevent the burnout of these crucial health professionals following ‘the year that was’.”

Find more information on how to protect yourself, your family and community from COVID-19 at www.health.gov.au.

Find a video from the Federal Department of Health on how to properly wear a mask here: <https://publish.viostream.com/play/bfxgwognhhfmmn>.

A high resolution photo of Dr Adam Coltzau is available here: <https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/712>

A high resolution photo of ACRRM President, Dr Ewen McPhee, is available here: <https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/968>

A high resolution photo of RDAA President, Dr John Hall, is available here: <https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/687>

Available for interview:

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