

Unexpected benefits of medical student rotations to a small rural community

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Dr Peter Arvier was originally a graduate of the University of Queensland but has been a medical nomad for most of his career working mainly in rural and regional hospitals. He has worked in every state and territory of Australia except WA and also worked in rural Canada.

Peter is currently working as the Associate Head of the University of Tasmania Rural Clinical School and is responsible for the academic teaching program for 58 Year 4 and final year medical students. He also works part time as one of the senior medical staff in the emergency department of the North West Regional Hospital and Mersey Community Hospital. His research interests mainly involve workforce issues, in particular the transition from undergraduate training to rural post graduate career paths.

Peter lives in a stunningly beautiful part of north-west Tasmania with his wife and a large menagerie of high-maintenance animals, including three teenage sons. Other important interests outside medicine include self-sufficient farming, snow sports and the local volunteer fire brigade.

For some years, our Rural Clinical School has rotated final-year students to a small rural community to undertake six-week attachments at the local general practice. As links with this community and its health professionals have strengthened, medical student activities have expanded to include:

- Year 4 students undertaking an intensive weekend of emergency skills
- Year 2 students on rural community placements
- Year 1 student visits as part of their introductory 'rural week'.

The first RCS student will be returning to this practice as a GP registrar in 2011.

While not initially planned as such, a number of additional social, educational and financial benefits have flowed through to the community as a result of enthusiastic local support and increasing university involvement. These include:

- community participation in the emergency skills weekend
- emergency service volunteers from outlying towns participating in annual training exercises
- in-house education and training for local district hospital and medical staff
- local expertise to take similar training packages to other rural communities
- new infrastructure at the general practice
- allied health student rotations
- new student accommodation
- increasing local high school participation in health careers camps
- participation in the Sustainable Farm Families program.

This presentation will further explore how a mutually supportive culture of health professional education is helping to support and sustain small rural communities.