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## New pilot a big win for regional health

28 January 2020

Two Australian hospitals will receive a boost to their workforces as part of a new pilot that is being launched by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) and the Commonwealth Department of Health funded through the Specialist Training Program (STP).

The 'New Fellow Rural Placement Pilot' will see Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH) and Cairns Hospital both receive funding for an additional surgeon at their hospitals.

The aim of the pilot is to provide New Fellows with a comprehensive, high quality experience in a rural location that will help them consolidate their skills, with the intention to encourage them to consider working in a rural setting long-term.

RACS Northern Territory Chair Mr Mahiban Thomas, who is also the Director of Surgery at RDH, has been a passionate advocate for rural and regional surgery, and said that the announcement was a major win for RDH and the Territory.

"In the NT we face unique challenges because of our geographical isolation and low population density. We have experienced ongoing issues trying to attract and retain surgeons, particularly those at the start of their careers who might potentially look to base themselves here long-term.

"I know an additional full-time placement may not seem that significant to those based in a major metropolitan area, but for regional communities initiatives like this are significant. The pilot is a great opportunity for us to sell the amazing lifestyle that Darwin has to offer, and forms an important part of our strategy to attract new surgeons to the area."

These sentiments were echoed by vascular surgeon Dr Roxanne Wu who led the application process for the Cairns bid.

"It is absolutely terrific to bring in new people to Cairns and to be able to share the wealth of work that there is to do and to show them that working in a regional area does not mean working in isolation" Dr Wu said.

"We have great clinical resources, great clinical work, and there are so many amazing rewards that you get from working with patients that have such a real need for your services.

"We are very grateful for this opportunity and I think that the way the pilot is structured is a really good model that will benefit everybody involved."

South West Victorian Ear Nose and Throat Surgeon, and Chair of the College's Rural Surgery Section Committee, Dr Bridget Clancy, said that it was often difficult to attract metropolitan based surgeons to regional locations for a number of reasons. This included the perception that there will be added expectations of on-call work and overtime.

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“Our rural and regional communities are fantastic places to work and live. From a professional perspective there is usually a diverse caseload mix which is excellent experience especially for younger surgeons just starting out.

“As part of the pilot we asked hospitals to demonstrate that they could meet a number of criteria, including having at least two practising consultant surgeons already based in the hospital, and a willing mentor.

“A commitment to safety and sustainability was also required, with surgeons rostered in keeping with RACS Safe Hours Policy. In addition to this, the funding provided will be divided between a mixture of salary support, professional development, and relocation assistance.

“We will shortly begin advertising the two positions with a view to the pilot commencing in 2020. If it is successful we hope to be able to incorporate it as part of our broader rural health strategy aimed at providing better access to surgical care in our regional communities.”

ENDS.