

'In terms of work, I like the fact that you can really engage with a community and be helpful in people's lives.'

Looking back on his time as a general practice registrar, Dr Hughes recalled his experiences with inspiring supervisors.

'[They are] rural GPs who are multi-talented and multi-skilled and work well under pressure,' he said. 'They really confirmed that I do want to be a rural GP.'

Today, Dr Hughes has settled with his wife and newborn child in the small town of Wynyard close to where he grew up. He works at the Saunders Street Clinic, which he described as 'a beautifully designed clinic with a lovely group of people and a relaxed, inviting atmosphere'.

Research

Dr Hughes received his RACGP Fellowship at the end of 2015 and is nearing completion of his Fellowship in Advanced Rural General Practice (FARGP). While the FARGP has helped broaden Dr Hughes' skill-set in care delivery for rural patients, it also provided unexpected additional benefit.

'It was part of my FARGP to do a six-month community-based project, with the

option to make it a research-type project,' he said. 'I was a little apprehensive, having never done research in my undergraduate career, but it has been such a good learning experience. I think more GPs should get involved with it.'

'I know there are barriers for GPs and general practice registrars to do research, but it's been fun – a lot more fun than I thought it would be – and it's a good skill-set to develop in your career. It has been a highlight for me.'

Dr Hughes' FARGP research project, 'E-referrals: Why are we still faxing?' focuses on eHealth, a subject he feels is vital to the future of general practice, particularly in rural and regional areas.

'I think [eHealth] has the potential to be a game changer for rural medicine because of the obvious constraints of remoteness,' he said. 'It just bridges that gap, to be able to get up your screen and talk with an urban specialist and get the best expertise on your care.'

'But, more than that, I think eHealth is an area where we are really dragging our feet in general practice in comparison with a lot of other industries and fields. We're still faxing, we're still posting letters.'

Dr Hughes would like to continue conducting general practice research through his career and has found a good local source of support and encouragement.

'There's a thriving research community based at the rural clinical school [at the University of Tasmania],' he said. 'They've been really helpful with getting my research off the ground and ironing out the creases.'

'I hope to be involved more going forward because it's enjoyable and it's nice to contribute to the communal knowledge base.'

Dr Hughes described being named as the RACGP's 2016 General Practice Registrar of the Year as 'a really pleasant surprise'.

'It's a very touching, unexpected achievement that firms my choice to be a rural GP,' he said.

The accolade crowns what has been a deeply satisfying training journey.

'I enjoyed all of my different terms as a junior doctor. It's been nice to see a broad range of different things, different acute medical care,' Dr Hughes said. 'And coming back to my home community and being able to contribute has been a real highlight.'



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