18 June 2015

The Hon. Jillian Skinner, MP
Minister for Health
State Government of New South Wales
52 Martin Place
Sydney NSW 2000

Cc: Dr Richard Abbott

Dear Minister,

NRF RESEARCH INTO ADVANCED SKILLS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) National Rural Faculty has recently undertaken a number of extensive policy and research projects on rural advanced skills. This work forms part of a broader strategy and focused effort to prioritise a number of non-procedural rural advanced skill areas which are seen by our membership as essential in addressing service need in rural Australia.

The importance of establishing area resilience to support service continuity in rural areas cannot be underestimated and there is a need for real support nationally in this area. Two key areas where rural GPs are meeting a significant unmet need is in the provision of mental health care and palliative care. The work that we are progressing, which is both informed by research and responsive to members needs, is aimed toward securing targeted training supports for these specific skill areas in each jurisdiction.

The NRF’s Mental Health Capacity Building Project, which commenced in December 2014, has included the release of a revised Advanced Rural Skills Training Mental Health Curriculum. In progressing this skill priority in New South Wales, I would like to acknowledge Dr Richard Abbott, Director of Rural Generalist Training Program, HETI – Rural and Remote Portfolio and his team. Working collaboratively, we have identified opportunities to prioritise mental health skills training for registrars involved in the NSW Rural Generalist Program.

For those at a more advanced stages of learning, the NRF is focusing the next project phase on developing stronger training models to ensure rural GPs have access to training. Whilst this final project phase, scheduled for completion by December, has an internal focus there is certainly scope to increase the training supports for practising rural GPs nationally. The Faculty has long-advocated for a skill acquisition pathway for practising rural GPs to secure stronger retention outcomes in rural areas. The current recruitment focus is limiting and should be balanced by an effort which supports those already working to address rural disparities.

The Faculty’s Palliative Care Project commenced in April 2015 which has included targeted research to determine the nature and extent of GP led palliative care in rural and remote communities. The results of this survey reflect both skill need and service deficits in rural communities, and solutions in terms of improved access to palliative care for patients and their families.
Over 520 rural GPs provided feedback about the palliative care issues in their communities, confirming that there are significant barriers preventing GPs from undertaking this important work. These barriers fall across the full service system including from within the community, hospital, residential aged care and hospice facilities.

There were 143 survey respondents from New South Wales, predominantly from RA 2 & 3 and additional work has been undertaken by the NRF team to extrapolate these state-level results. These are provided at Attachment 1, with a copy of the full national results at Attachment 2. We hope these results will be useful particularly in prioritising targeted training supports for practising rural GPs in New South Wales.

It is important to note that the Australian Government provides a number of existing initiatives, such as the Decision Assist Project and the PEPA Program, which provide education, training and placement programs. We would urge expansion of these types of funded initiatives. In addition, state-led strategies to improve service delivery and build capacity must be prioritised as these services will become increasingly important as our population ages and demand increases.

The provision of both mental health and palliative care services remain as significant health sector challenges particularly in rural communities where there are service deficits and distance challenges. I would welcome the opportunity to work with you further on refinement and targeting of your strategies for New South Wales going forward. Should you require further information regarding the research or to arrange a meeting please contact Ms Lauren Cordwell, Manager, RACGP National Rural Faculty, on (03) 8699 0490.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ayman Shenouda
Chair, National Rural Faculty

Attach (2).
RACGP New South Wales Palliative Care Survey: Analysis for Minister Skinner

Whilst GP-led palliative care services in rural areas are provided across all settings, the majority of NSW GPs were providing community based care (77%) or services within a residential aged care or hospice care facility (66%) with just under half of those surveyed reporting that they also provided services within the hospital (45%).

Findings indicate that fragmentation of care and poor communication between service providers is impacting on the ability of the GP to coordinate and continue care for rural palliative care patients. The undefined role of the rural GP in the palliative care team also requires further policy attention, particularly in finding efficiencies in working across service settings.

Nearly two-thirds of NSW respondents indicated a need for more GP-led palliative care services in their rural community. To facilitate greater access to palliative care services, respondents reported that adequate funding, more education and greater collaboration across primary and acute health care settings is required, with better use of clinical pathways and earlier identification of patients who would benefit from advance care planning.

In terms of skill recognition and right to practice, NSW respondents indicated that there are no clear accreditation or credentialing arrangements for palliative care, and a significant portion of NSW participants reported that their palliative care skills were not recognised at a local (67%) or state (79%) level. These are important requirements in enabling both the utilisation of skillsets and finding sustainable service solutions in rural areas.

Training and skill recognition across the full multidisciplinary palliative care team are also key factors in ensuring the rural workforce is equipped to meet current and future need. Training barriers persist for rural GPs in terms of access to, and availability of, upskilling opportunities in palliative care. Lack of time and the cost of being away from practice are major barriers to training, and can be addressed through more flexible training options which utilise both technology and locally available clinical expertise.

NSW participants indicated that further support is needed to assist rural GPs in providing palliative care in their community, including more GP specific training opportunities (73%), adequate remuneration (66%), support from palliative specialist (58%) and a GP specific targeted training incentive (48%). Whilst 25% stated that they had access to training, 30% said training was not available to them and a further 37% said that training was available but required too much time away from their practice.

We were also able to identify the regions in NSW where doctors have stated an interest in advanced skills training. The majority of those who indicated an interest (13 respondents) were clustered around the Mid North Coast of NSW. Of these, 9 were vocationally registered GPs, 3 were non-VR GPs, and one registrar.

Please also refer to the full national results at Attachment 2.
18 June 2015

The Hon. Jill Hennessy, MP
Minister for Health
Government of Victoria
Level 22, 50 Lonsdale Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Minister,

NRF RESEARCH INTO PALLIATIVE CARE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) National Rural Faculty has recently undertaken research to determine the nature and extent of GP led palliative care in rural and remote communities. The results of this survey reflect both skill need and service deficits in rural communities, and solutions in terms of improve access to palliative care for patients and their families.

The provision of palliative care services remains one of our most significant health sector challenges. Our research shows a rural health system that is inadequately resourced and struggling to respond to current demand, yet alone future need, for palliative care services.

Over 520 rural GPs, 116 from Victoria, provided feedback about the palliative care issues in their communities, confirming that there are significant barriers preventing GPs from undertaking this important work across community, hospital, residential aged care and hospice facilities.

Findings indicate that fragmentation of care and poor communication between service providers impact on the ability of the GP to coordinate and continue care for rural palliative care patients. The undefined role of the rural GP in the palliative care team also requires further policy attention, particularly in finding efficiencies in working across service settings.

Training and skill recognition across the full multidisciplinary palliative care team are also key factors in ensuring the rural workforce is equipped to meet current and future need. Training barriers persist for rural GPs in terms of access to, and availability of, upskilling opportunities in palliative care. Lack of time and the cost of being away from practice are major barriers to training, and can be addressed through more flexible training options which utilise both technology and locally available clinical expertise.

The Australian Government provides a number of existing initiatives, such as the Decision Assist Project and the PEPA Program, which provide education, training and placement programs. We would urge expansion of these types of funded initiatives. In addition, state-led strategies to improve service delivery and build capacity must be prioritised as these services will become increasingly important as our population ages and demand increases.

I have enclosed a copy of the survey results and together with the Faculty team we hope these results will be useful particularly in informing future targeted policy in Victoria. I would welcome the opportunity to work with you further on refinement and targeting of your strategies going forward. Should you require further information regarding the research or to arrange a meeting please contact Ms Lauren Cordwell, Manager, RACGP National Rural Faculty, on (03) 8699 0490.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ayman Shenouda
Chair, National Rural Faculty
Dear Minister,

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The provision of palliative care services remains one of our most significant health sector challenges. Our research shows a rural health system that is inadequately resourced and struggling to respond to current demand, yet alone future need, for palliative care services.

Over 520 rural GPs, 124 from Queensland, provided feedback about the palliative care issues in their communities, confirming that there are significant barriers preventing GPs from undertaking this important work across community, hospital, residential aged care and hospice facilities.

Findings indicate that fragmentation of care and poor communication between service providers impact on the ability of the GP to coordinate and continue care for rural palliative care patients. The undefined role of the rural GP in the palliative care team also requires further policy attention, particularly in finding efficiencies in working across service settings.

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I have enclosed a copy of the survey results and together with the Faculty team we hope these results will be useful particularly in informing future targeted policy in Queensland. I would welcome the opportunity to work with you further on refinement and targeting of your strategies going forward. Should you require further information regarding the research or to arrange a meeting please contact Ms Lauren Cordwell, Manager, RACGP National Rural Faculty, on (03) 8699 0490.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Ayman Shenouda
Chair, National Rural Faculty
18 June 2015

The Hon. Johan Wessel Elferink MLA
Minister for Health
Northern Territory Government
GPO Box 3146
DARWIN NT 0801

Dear Minister,

NRF RESEARCH INTO PALLIATIVE CARE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) National Rural Faculty has recently undertaken research to determine the nature and extent of GP led palliative care in rural and remote communities. The results of this survey reflect both skill need and service deficits in rural communities, and solutions in terms of improve access to palliative care for patients and their families.

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The Australian Government provides a number of existing initiatives, such as the Decision Assist Project and the PEPA Program, which provide education, training and placement programs. We would urge expansion of these types of funded initiatives. In addition, state-led strategies to improve service delivery and build capacity must be prioritised as these services will become increasingly important as our population ages and demand increases.

I have enclosed a copy of the survey results and together with the Faculty team we hope these results will be useful particularly in informing future targeted policy in the Northern Territory. I would welcome the opportunity to work with you further on refinement and targeting of your strategies going forward. Should you require further information regarding the research or to arrange a meeting please contact Ms Lauren Cordwell, Manager, RACGP National Rural Faculty, on (03) 8699 0490.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ayman Shenouda
Chair, National Rural Faculty
Dear Minister,

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The Australian Government provides a number of existing initiatives, such as the Decision Assist Project and the PEPA Program, which provide education, training and placement programs. We would urge expansion of these types of funded initiatives. In addition, state-led strategies to improve service delivery and build capacity must be prioritised as these services will become increasingly important as our population ages and demand increases.

I have enclosed a copy of the survey results and together with the Faculty team we hope these results will be useful particularly in informing future targeted policy in Tasmania. I would welcome the opportunity to work with you further on refinement and targeting of your strategies going forward. Should you require further information regarding the research or to arrange a meeting please contact Ms Lauren Cordwell, Manager, RACGP National Rural Faculty, on (03) 8699 0490.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ayman Shenouda
Chair, National Rural Faculty
18 June 2015

The Hon. Jack Snelling MP
Minister for Health
Government of South Australia
PO Box 2555
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Minister,

**NRF RESEARCH INTO PALLIATIVE CARE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES**

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) National Rural Faculty has recently undertaken research to determine the nature and extent of GP led palliative care in rural and remote communities. The results of this survey reflect both skill need and service deficits in rural communities, and solutions in terms of improve access to palliative care for patients and their families.

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I have enclosed a copy of the survey results and together with the Faculty team we hope these results will be useful particularly in informing future targeted policy in South Australia. I would welcome the opportunity to work with you further on refinement and targeting of your strategies going forward. Should you require further information regarding the research or to arrange a meeting please contact Ms Lauren Cordwell, Manager, RACGP National Rural Faculty, on (03) 8699 0490.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ayman Shenouda
Chair, National Rural Faculty
18 June 2015

The Hon. Kim Hames MP
Minister for Health
Government of Western Australia
PO Box 5551
FALCON WA 6210

Dear Minister,

NRF RESEARCH INTO PALLIATIVE CARE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) National Rural Faculty has recently undertaken research to determine the nature and extent of GP led palliative care in rural and remote communities. The results of this survey reflect both skill need and service deficits in rural communities, and solutions in terms of improve access to palliative care for patients and their families.

The provision of palliative care services remains one of our most significant health sector challenges. Our research shows a rural health system that is inadequately resourced and struggling to respond to current demand, yet alone future need, for palliative care services.

Over 520 rural GPs, 58 from Western Australia, provided feedback about the palliative care issues in their communities, confirming that there are significant barriers preventing GPs from undertaking this important work across community, hospital, residential aged care and hospice facilities.

Findings indicate that fragmentation of care and poor communication between service providers impact on the ability of the GP to coordinate and continue care for rural palliative care patients. The undefined role of the rural GP in the palliative care team also requires further policy attention, particularly in finding efficiencies in working across service settings.

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I have enclosed a copy of the survey results and together with the Faculty team we hope these results will be useful particularly in informing future targeted policy in Western Australia. I would welcome the opportunity to work with you further on refinement and targeting of your strategies going forward. Should you require further information regarding the research or to arrange a meeting please contact Ms Lauren Cordwell, Manager, RACGP National Rural Faculty, on (03) 8699 0490.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ayman Shenouda
Chair, National Rural Faculty
18 June 2015

The Hon. Simon Corbell  
Minister for Health  
ACT Government  
PO Box 825  
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601

Dear Minister,

NRF RESEARCH INTO PALLIATIVE CARE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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I have enclosed a copy of the survey results and together with the Faculty team we hope these results will be useful particularly in informing future targeted policy in the Australian Capital Territory. I would welcome the opportunity to work with you further on refinement and targeting of your strategies going forward. Should you require further information regarding the research or to arrange a meeting please contact Ms Lauren Cordwell, Manager, RACGP National Rural Faculty, on (03) 8699 0490.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ayman Shenouda  
Chair, National Rural Faculty