

RACGP awards rural GPs top honours - RACGP

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The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) has announced the winners of its annual Awards program for general practice.

The [RACGP Awards](#) recognise outstanding achievements and exceptional individuals for their contribution to rural general practice.

The winners of the RACGP's Rural Awards are:

- Brian Williams Award, Dr Richard Mayes, Castlemaine, Victoria
- Rural GP in Training of the Year, Dr Mubashar Sherazi, Mallacoota, Victoria
- Rural Medical Student Bursary Award, Ms Sophie Witherspoon, Mansfield, Victoria
- Community Project of the Year Award, Dr Khean Shang Wong, Broome, Western Australia

RACGP Rural Chair Dr Michael Clements congratulated the winners.

“As the home for rural general practice in Australia, the RACGP's Rural Awards are an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the rural GPs working hard to care for communities across Australia.

“Rural GPs couldn't be more deserving of the spotlight. They are essential for the health and wellbeing of rural communities, and they are in turn truly valued by their communities.

“As a rural GP myself, I know what entices medical graduates to go rural. It's a uniquely varied and rewarding career, no one day is the same, and you really get to know your patients and provide long-term holistic care, which general practice is all about.

“Rural practice is of course challenging, particularly in very remote areas, where there's no access to other health services so the community really relies on their local GP for all their health and wellbeing needs.

“This year's Rural Awards winners have truly gone above and beyond in caring for their patients and contributing to their communities and show great promise for their careers in general practice. Congratulations, and keep up the great work.”

Brian Williams Award winner Dr Richard Mayes has made an outstanding contribution to medical education across all levels of training, and amongst his peers. This includes teaching of registrars, medical students, together with providing support to his colleagues.

The Brian Williams Award commemorates the late Dr Brian Williams, a rural GP, medical educator, Director of the WA Centre for Remote and Rural Medicine, and a staunch advocate for rural general practice

Dr Mayes said he was honoured to receive the award.

“I am passionate about medical education, particularly rural obstetric care. As a rural GP I know how important these services are to rural communities,” he said.

“I believe in a holistic approach to health, considering the whole-person, rather than treating symptoms in isolation. This is why I'm involved in a local dance group, and I've encouraged a number of my older patients to join the program, not only for the physical health benefits but also for their mental health and wellbeing.”

Rural GP in Training of the Year, Dr Mubashar Sherazi is committed to a career in rural general practice and serving rural communities. He successfully completed GP training exams in 2020, sitting two exams just weeks after being evacuated from the devastating bushfires in Mallacoota.

The first doctor recruited to Mallacoota under a targeted recruitment strategy, in which communities with a high need for medical workforce receive recruitment support, Dr Sherazi said he enjoyed nothing more than serving his community.

“Before I came to Mallacoota in 2018, there was only one very hard-working female GP at Mallacoota Medical Practice, and there was far too much work for just one GP,” he said.

“I have really enjoyed my time here and responding to the needs of our community – for example, I enrolled in adolescent and child health training after recognising the community really needs these services.

“I’m also very passionate about medical education, and recently published my first book on the topic, which I hope will help to guide and support the next generation of GPs in training, like me.”

Ms Sophie Witherspoon received the Rural Medical Student Bursary for her essay on how to attract and retain medical graduates in rural practice.

The third-year medical student, studying through the University of Melbourne's Extended Rural Cohort (ERC) program in Mansfield said she decided to write the essay because it's a topic crucially relevant to rural GPs and communities

“As a rural student I feel the need to showcase my perspective – this is an issue not only relevant to rural GPs and our communities, but also politicians who have the power to make the changes we need,” she said.

“We really need to do more to invest in attracting and retaining rural and remote GPs, because there is a huge need in many communities, and it's having a very real impact on patients, as well as the workload for GPs who are there.”

Dr Khean Shang Wong receive the Community Project of the Year Award for his innovative project on the treatment of parasitic worms in the Kimberley Region in Western Australia.

Dr Wong said he was proud to receive the award, which recognises his project which has directly contributed to healthcare improvement and positively impacted the local community.

“Parasitic worms may not be a popular topic, but it is a serious health issue in the Kimberley region, and anyone can get it,” he said.

“I recognised part of the problem where I work was a lack of community awareness. There are simple steps people can take in terms of prevention and treatment, so I put together posters to help raise awareness across the region, as well as clear guidelines for managing parasites, which have been really useful for patients.”

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RACGP Rural Chair Dr Michael Clements and Rural Award winners are available for interview.

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About the RACGP

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) was established in 1958 and is Australia's peak general practice representative organisation.

The RACGP has more than 41,000 members working in or towards a career in general practice across metropolitan, regional and rural areas of the country. Nine in every 10 GPs are with the RACGP.