

“Tell ‘er she’s dreamin’!”

James Fitzpatrick¹, Tanya Lehmann²

¹The George Institute for Global Health, ²Country Health SA

TL: ‘Do you remember when things turned around so well for rural health?’

JF: ‘No: remind me.’

‘It started at the National Rural Health Conference back in Adelaide. Do you remember that one?’

‘Of course I do: it’s where we met. And I knitted you some bright woolly socks.’

‘We were all determined to turn around that Medicare deficit of a billion dollars a year. And tackle that other billion in lack of access to allied health, the PBS, and oral health care ...’

‘Really? Was it that much?? Good gracious, we took on the world!’

‘And we built on some early runs with tackling Indigenous smoking to design illness prevention and health promotion for people outside the cities. We took the line that good mental health and having babies and living well and healthy ageing were all part of life in rural and remote communities, not something that could only happen in specialised centres in major cities.’

‘But that’s no big deal—just common sense!’

‘True. But there’s more. Telehealth was still in its infancy. People were inspired with what could be done—in the sessions and in the exhibition hall. Rural and remote health professionals and consumers signed up for the eHealth record and insisted that it was made to work for them. Country people joined up with their ‘Medicare Locals’ and Local Health Networks so that State Governments and Feds were working together on country services that worked. Good research in rural areas really took off and provided evidence on needs analysis and service design that gave attention to the social determinants of health in rural areas ...’

‘I certainly remember the energy and passion at that Conference. It was a real landmark in ensuring a bright future for rural health.’

‘Yep. And I still have those bright woolly socks.’