

Student report

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Attending the 12th National Rural Health Conference (NRHC) in Adelaide earlier this month was one of the most educational, enjoyable and inspiring experiences I have had in my medical degree so far. I would thus really like to thank the RAMUS committee members for giving me the opportunity to participate in the NRHC, and have such a fantastic experience.

Not only did this 4 day conference highlight to me the vast number of issues that rural health is currently experiencing (way beyond the extent to which I had previously been aware), but also the exceptional efforts that are being made to combat these issues, and the processes required to actually make a change. Furthermore, attending the NRHC gave me the rare opportunity to network with not only other rural health oriented medical students, but also students from other health professionals, and other RAMUS recipients.

Exceptional speakers, rare networking opportunities, inspirational community organisations, fantastically organised social functions and the ability to participate in the recommendations process to present to parliament were the highlights of my NRHC experience.

Speakers

Throughout the conference, there was a strong focus on promoting and advocating for the needs of disabled people's in rural communities. The speech given by Dougie Herd from the NDIS was particularly memorable. Dougie, who himself has a disability, presented such a strong, committed, and humorous presentation, advocating for the rights of disabled people and promoting their social inclusion, that I will likely never forget it. His presentation also further helped to tie in all the issues regarding access to disability care and the requirements for specialised funding for disabilities in rural areas raised in the earlier concurrent sessions.

The presentation given by Tanya Pilbersek was also a particular highlight. It was very encouraging to see first hand the impact and outcomes that holding the NRHC *will* have on rural health, and how both state and federal governments are committed to be involved in conferences such as this. I also found the Tanya's discussion as to the logistics of change surrounding the recommendations presented, and the reality of legislative and funding changes.

Alison Fairleigh's presentation relating to the improvement of rural mental health via the use of technology, and her own personal encounter of dealing with depression via social networking sites was a third speaker highlight for me. Alison's presentation really allowed me to understand how policy changes, such as additional funding for rural technology infrastructure really ties into changes, such as improved internet access and subsequent options for mental health treatments. Furthermore, along with many other presentations throughout the 4 days, Alison highlighted the broad range of areas requiring change to improve rural health in Australia.

Networking and social functions

The committee responsible for organising the NRHC did an exceptional job in organising the social functions held throughout the four days. These social functions included an introductory student cocktail dinner, a wine and cheese night, student organised dinner functions and best of all, the 'Bright Colours' health ball. These functions provided fantastic networking opportunities, allowing me to make friends with medical students from other universities, converse with the attending health politicians and health professionals, and experience the social side of rural health.

Recommendations process

The recommendations process conducted throughout the conference was an important means of identifying and highlighting the main issues that rural health is currently facing and providing suggestions for improvement. The recommendations were presented to Tanya Pilbersek on the final day of the conference, and are essential in making a start to the 'bright future' that rural health holds. This being my first conference, this process was a steep learning curve for me. It was very encouraging to see the openly stated issues that need addressing in rural health today, and also how active and united members of different rural communities are in taking the steps required to make the necessary changes. It was also encouraging to note the role of each and every attendee at the conference in making the necessary recommendations, and also the priority recommendations required. I believe that participating in this process and evaluating the recommendations made will especially be of benefit to me in the public health component of my studies.

Community groups

The performances made by a number of local community groups were particularly humbling and inspiring times during the NRHC. Of particular note was the performance given by the Tutti special requirements choir and also the *What makes your day worth it?* presentation by Emma Beech. Both of these performances highlighted the importance of inclusion and advocacy of rights of the marginalised, the outcomes possible when efforts are taken to give all members of society equal chances and the joy that can be created by those unexpected.