Rural Pharmacists Australia (RPA) is a joint initiative of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, the Pharmacy Guild of Australia and the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia.

Pharmacists provide a unique service which complements those of other health professionals. Much of what they do, however, is hidden from official view. Rarely considered or consulted, they are vulnerable to the decisions of health planners who often forget the contribution of pharmacists to primary health care.

- The Australian public consults its pharmacists about 120 million times a year.
- Over 25% of all Australian pharmacists (approx 3 000) are found in rural and remote community and hospital pharmacies.
- Community pharmacies are open 55 hours (average) per week, 6-7 days per week, are on call after hours and need no appointment.
- Rural pharmacists have intimate knowledge of their local communities and their health needs.
- It is often not recognised that rural pharmacists are integral members of the health care team.
- Rural community and hospital pharmacies act as:
  - health promotion centres
  - community health centres
  - drug information centres

Rural pharmacists play a key role by providing:

- An initial point of contact into the health system for the rural patient.
- Medication management, eg
  - dispensing prescriptions
  - prescribing Schedule 3 medications
  - providing verbal and written advice on medication use
  - medication management and review services for the frail aged in the community and in residential care
  - supply and maintenance of home health care equipment
  - hospital discharge and follow up services
• Specialist advice, eg
  • monitoring and education about diabetes and asthma management and control
  • advice about incontinence and associated products

• Public health, eg
  • provision of health screening programs
  • health promotion and public health education

• Personal support, eg
  • mental health management support
  • advice on health and family matters
  • grief and stress support

• Support of other health professionals, eg
  • referral of patient to other health workers, especially GPs
  • facilitating sessional services by visiting health workers (optometrists, podiatrists, baby health nurses, etc).

Critical Issues

For pharmacists in rural practice, key concerns revolve around -

• IDENTITY - both as a profession and as individual practitioners

• ROLE in the rural health care delivery system

• LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE PHARMACIST’S ROLE by other health care practitioners

• UNIQUE NEEDS, arising from their professional distinctiveness and their rurality.

Do pharmacists feature in your rural health services planning?

RPA-SIG Objectives

The RPA-SIG has been established to:-

• provide a means for rural pharmacists to identify and deal with common practice interests and issues unique to rural pharmacy at the local, regional and national levels;
• improve the practice of rural pharmacy in community and institutional settings;

• optimise the professional role of pharmacists in the rural health system;

• support rural pharmacists at the local level and provide them with a way of transferring information to, and having representation at, the State and national levels; and

• bring to the attention of government and health planners the pharmacy-based activities and projects occurring at the local rural level.