MEDIA RELEASE

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Improving systems for remote health and governance

The tertiary cancer centre for the Kimberley region of WA is Perth – 2,400kms from Broome and 3,500kms from Kununurra. The Rural Cancer Nurse Coordinator for the region is based in Broome and the Palliative Care Nurse Coordinator in Kununurra. Despite these huge distances, care coordination can work well as long as there is teamwork and good communication between all health care providers, resulting in a smooth transition from diagnosis to treatment as required.

Inspiring stories about how the management of care for patients in very remote areas can be successfully achieved will be an important element of the 12th National Rural Health Conference in Adelaide in April. This Kimberley tale will be told by Sarah Davies and Sally Thomas.

However, not all aspects of life and service delivery in remote areas receive such a positive report. Bruce Walker and Fred Chaney, from Desert Knowledge Australia in Alice Springs, will make the case that Australia’s system of democracy and economy and the accompanying policy and program settings have progressively been altered to serve the coastal areas where some 85 per cent of Australia’s population lives – at the expense of remote Australia, its people and how its communities are governed.

Bruce and Fred will argue the need for systemic change which will have to be based on a paradigm shift in policy which cannot come from within the present governance framework. They will refer to their recent report titled Fixing the hole in Australia’s heartland: How government needs to work in remote Australia.

In his paper in the same concurrent session, John Wakerman will discuss the growing recognition of the remote, as distinct from rural, health sector. John will report on a study which used both quantitative and qualitative data to distinguish the characteristics of remote health and health services, drawing out implications for health policy and practice.

The session will be rounded out by Dean Carson, Professor of Rural and Remote Research at Flinders University, who will use data from the 2001, 2006 and 2011 censuses to examine how the spatial and occupational distributions of health professionals in South Australia and the Northern Territory changed over that decade.

More information on the Conference can be found at www.ruralhealth.org.au