From closure to world stage—a journey of rural commitment

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When faced with extreme health care reform the small rural community can either accept an economic rationalist view of local health service provision or it can use the agenda as a catalyst to a new beginning and create exponentially better outcomes. Hesse Rural Health took the longer term strategic option, sought its destiny, raised the bar and is now a unique rural health care success story.

This is a presentation rich in both organisational and community learning. It begins with the community challenged by the need to sustain and be involved in local services. As the service mix changes and new robust structures emerge it will demonstrate the value of vision, wisdom and planning. The emphasis then shifts from viability to service enrichment through the creation of new programs specific to community need.

Hesse has developed from a rural hospital facing closure to a key integrated rural health service with multiple program layers. In the process the business of the health service has grown five-fold, with complementing growth in local employment and community participation.

Strategic planning, commitment to quality and creativity are integral to successful long-term rural organisational sustainability. Hesse is now going somewhere, driven by the ingenuity of its staff and the commitment of the community.

This paper will present other key outcomes overcoming health inequity for our rural community:

- the successful engagement of the Bendigo Community Bank to construct new health service infrastructure in a national demonstration project
- the commitment to improved farming generational health by targeting primary aged children
- and finally, the creation of an innovative and leading edge rural dementia environment resulting in Hesse being selected to be the Australian voice on an International collaborative to achieve electronic access to best practice rural dementia projects across the globe.

These key developments have placed our organisation before a much wider audience and helped keep country Australia on the map.

Our journey is one of resilience, vision and rural commitment.