Now in its seventh year, RAMUS assists selected students from rural and remote areas to study medicine. Nearly 600 RAMUS scholars have completed their degrees and to assist them to develop their rural careers NRHA, with financial support from the Department of Health and Ageing, has established the RAMUS Alumnus network.

The project focuses on the early career decisions and career paths of RAMUS graduates. Completed RAMUS scholars have been surveyed for information and views on these matters. Recognising the key role of mentors in the Scheme, they too have been surveyed. The mentor survey was sent out in December 2006 and the Scholar survey in January 2007.

This seminar at the 9th Conference saw invited stakeholders hearing and discussing some of the preliminary findings of the tracking survey. It also included consideration of ideas for further development of the RAMUS Alumnus group. Participants included current RAMUS scholars and mentors, academics, representatives from NRHA’s Member Bodies and staff of the Department of Health and Ageing.

At the time of the Conference, surveys from 203 mentors and 50 scholars had been processed. Peter Brown presented preliminary findings based on this limited sample from the returned surveys. Peter stressed that the limited nature of the sample and the preliminary nature of the analysis meant that a cautious approach should be applied to the interim results available.

The mentor survey comprised 7 statements about aspects of the Scheme with provision for responses to each across a 5 point scale, ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. The survey questions covered the role of payments, mentoring, learning plans, service bonding, administrative aspects of the Scheme and the impact of the Scheme on the choice of a rural career.

Mentor responses were broadly favourable to the Scheme. Large majorities indicated positive impressions on each of the 7 aspects of the Scheme. Sizeable minorities (around 20%) responded “Not Sure” to questions about the value and structure of the learning plan, service bonding and some administrative aspects. Negative responses (“Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree”) did not exceed 4% for any item.

The Scholar survey was a more complex document covering evaluation of the RAMUS Scheme, career choice and intention, workforce participation, rural practice and factors contributing to the discontinuation of rural practice (if applicable). The interim results provided a useful stimulus to discussion, but given the small sample size, precluded conclusive analysis. Seminar participants provided useful feedback for the next stage of the project and encouraged continuing efforts to maximise the response rate.

2006 Mentor Award

Gordon Gregory presented the annual RAMUS Mentor Award which recognises mentors who have given exceptional support to RAMUS scholars through the RAMUS Rural Doctor Mentor Program. Each year, current and former RAMUS scholars are invited to nominate mentors who have provided support and inspiration and who have opened doors to special experiences, people or events.

The 2006 awards were made (in absentia) to:

- Dr John Hall of Stanthorpe, Queensland
- Dr Mostyn Hamdorf of Dunsborough, Western Australia.
Dr Hall was nominated by Michael Tremellen, a fourth year student at the University of Queensland and Dr Hamdorf was nominated by Dennis Millard, a fourth year student at the University of Western Australia.

Alumnus

The seminar also considered the roles that the RAMUS Alumnus might develop. There was general recognition of the challenges implicit in providing services to a target group which was distributed throughout Australia and which was at varying levels of professional training. In addition, the primary interest of the group—professional development, particularly in the early postgraduate years—was also catered for by several professional associations in the medical sector. Discussion centred on the provision of on-line services. Key suggestions included:

• an on-line forum to allow postgraduates to swap experiences relevant to their current stage of professional development
• moderated contact groups to facilitate communication among the RAMUS cohort
• an investigation of the possibility of re-introduction of the GAPP program
• encouragement of continuing mentoring and the provision of resources to strengthen this function
• the institution of a “Member or alumnus of the month’ to promote awareness of individual success stories
• a potential register of medical placement venues with a rating system to evaluate the placement venue.

RAMUS Manager Susan Magnay thanked participants for their contributions to the discussion. She acknowledged that the Alumnus was still in its fledgling stage and welcomed the suggestions made as a useful basis for its continuing development.

Presenter

Peter Brown worked for the Australian Government for many years as an administrator in arts and cultural organisations, including the Australia Council. He served as Cultural Councillor in the Australian Embassy, Beijing from 1990 to 1995, before joining the National Council for the Centenary of Federation. He has worked for Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH) and was part of the organising team for the 8th National Rural Health Conference. He joined the National Rural Health Alliance in April 2006 to work on the RAMUS Tracking Survey.