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Rural health research in spotlight

The recent announcement of an additional \$100m to increase clinical trial participation for rural Australians has been welcomed by the Editor in Chief of the [Australian Journal of Rural Health](#). In his editorial in the December 2019 issue, Professor Russell Roberts endorsed the focus of this initiative on improving facilities and services and increasing rural research capacity.

Professor Roberts says “The joint announcement by the Minister for Regional Services, Decentralisation and Local Government and the Minister of Health bodes well for the intended outcomes and for genuine rural input, control and oversight of the process.”

While much of the detail of the program is yet to be announced, Professor Roberts offers suggestions to avoid some of the traps that might impede the success of the program. Noting the importance of linking the program with strategy and identified priorities, he points to the need for a rural health strategy as a basis for effective program implementation. He also highlights the need for local control. “If we are serious about improving rural research outcomes, the control of the funding must lie with rural communities,” Professor Roberts said.

Two leading articles in the December 2019 issue highlight important advantages that rural medical training offers to junior medical officers.

In a [case study](#)* comparing the experiences of junior medical officers in the emergency departments of metropolitan and rural hospitals, Associate Editor Andrew Bonney and his team found that junior medical officers reported feeling more supported at the rural hospital due to direct contact and communication with senior medical officers. The study provides support for including well-supervised emergency department rural rotations in rural medical workforce initiatives to increase the likelihood of future rural practice.

These positive aspects of rural medical training are supported by a [second study](#)[^] which examined work-life conditions and satisfaction levels rural junior doctors. This first national study found that rural junior doctors were significantly more satisfied with their work-life balance, ability to obtain desired leave and leave at short notice, personal study time and access to leisure interests compared with metropolitan junior doctors.

Welcoming this issue of the Journal, Dr Gabrielle O’Kane, Chief Executive Officer of the [National Rural Health Alliance](#) said “This is another good selection of articles to assist everyone interested in rural and remote health. The Alliance welcomes the continuing contribution the Journal makes to the knowledge base on rural health.”

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The National Rural Health Alliance is Australia’s peak non-government organisation for rural and remote health.

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Cited articles:

* Bonney, A, Mullan, J, Hammond, A, et al. A case-study of the experiences of junior medical officers in the emergency departments of a metropolitan hospital and rural hospital. Aust. J. Rural Health. 2019; 00: 1- 6. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12526>

^ Lennon, M, O'Sullivan, B, McGrail, M, Russell, D, Suttie, J, Preddy, J. Attracting junior doctors to rural centres: A national study of work-life conditions and satisfaction. Aust. J. Rural Health. 2019; 00: 1– 7. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12577>