

Saturday 15 October 2022

## SA rural doctor recognised for “selfless and major” contribution to community and profession

A Rural Generalist doctor who initially planned on becoming a teacher – but has gone on to serve the South Australian community of Murray Bridge for 35 years, and has led the rural doctors movement in the state for more than a decade – is one of two doctors to receive the RDAA Rural Doctor of the Year Award 2022.

**Dr Peter Rischbieth** was presented with the award at the Rural Medicine Australia (RMA22) conference dinner in Canberra on Friday night.

He joins **Dr Sue Velovski**, a Specialist General Surgeon in the Northern Rivers Region of NSW, in receiving the Award this year.

The Award is presented annually to a rural doctor who has shown exceptional work ‘above and beyond’ the call of duty, and leadership in areas like improving access to quality healthcare for their community.

Importantly, Dr Rischbieth’s Award recognises the pivotal role he has undertaken, as President of the Rural Doctors Association of South Australia (RDASA), in helping to lead negotiations for a new and fairer contract for SA rural GPs who provide Visiting Medical Officer (VMO) services to their local hospitals.

He took on this additional and significant voluntary workload at a time when, like all his rural colleagues, he was also incredibly busy supporting his patients and the wider community through the COVID pandemic.

Born prematurely in South Africa while he and his family were enroute to Australia from the United Kingdom in 1957, Dr Rischbieth was raised in Adelaide.

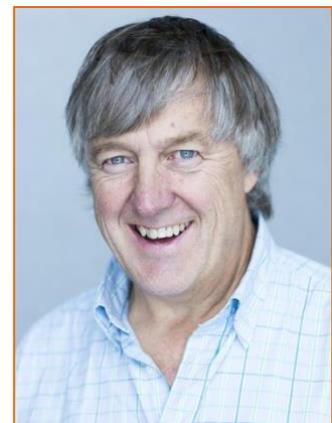
He has been married to his wife, Mandy, for 41 years, and has two adult sons and three grandchildren. Outside Medicine, Dr Rischbieth is a self-confessed cricket tragic.

Dr Rischbieth was inspired to consider Rural Medicine as a career while watching his father (a neurologist) and uncle (a paediatrician) providing free consultations to the community of Penneshaw – while on holidays on Kangaroo Island in the 1960s – so local patients could avoid travelling 100 kilometres on dirt roads to access the next nearest care.

However, his pathway into Medicine was not easy – he had to repeat Year 12 to get the required tertiary entrance score for medical school, and had already been accepted into teachers’ college before he received a ‘last gasp’ offer to study Medicine.

**RDAA President, Dr Megan Belot, said:** “While Peter would have made a great teacher, we are so glad he was accepted into medical school – he has made an immense contribution both as a Rural Generalist doctor in Murray Bridge and as a tireless advocate for rural healthcare in South Australia and nationally.

“His unwavering commitment to his rural medical colleagues and SA’s rural communities was demonstrated yet again during the SA rural GP VMO contract re-negotiations which he led as RDASA President in conjunction with AMA(SA). The success of these negotiations was critical in helping to address the severe rural doctor workforce shortages that have been impacting SA over many years.



“For South Australia to make inroads into the significant shortage of rural doctors in that state, significant changes in the contract conditions for SA’s rural doctors needed to occur. Peter not only provided leadership throughout the negotiations, but also helped to inform health policy-makers in the SA Government and SA Health Department on the broader issues of rural medical workforce planning – and he is not done yet.

“The importance of the role that Peter played in these negotiations cannot be overstated, and the success ultimately achieved is testament to his selfless and tireless efforts that consumed a very considerable amount of his own time outside his clinical workload.

“More widely, Peter has been RDASA President for 12 of the past 14 years, and a member of the RDASA Executive (including Vice President) for many more. He also served as RDAA President from 2007 to 2008, and was RDAA Vice President before that.

“During his years of involvement with RDASA and RDAA, he has represented rural doctors and their communities in hundreds of meetings with the federal and state governments, and has undertaken hundreds of media interviews on behalf of RDAA or RDASA – often at short notice.

“As a Rural Generalist doctor, Peter has provided primary care, anaesthetics and obstetrics care, emergency care and inpatient care for the Murray Bridge community from 1987 to the present.

“He has been a partner at the local Bridge Clinic for 35 years, the Principal Medical Officer at Murray Bridge Soldiers Memorial Hospital for 21 years, and a Board member of the Country SA Primary Health Network (PHN) since 2017.

“He has also taken an active role in teaching and supervising medical students, interns and GP Registrars in Murray Bridge for many years, and has been a highly respected mentor to many future and junior doctors.

“His colleagues say Peter is a selfless contributor to the Bridge Clinic, and he is highly regarded in the community for his long-serving contribution to local healthcare, particularly the provision of emergency medical services.

“We warmly congratulate Peter on receiving this highly deserved recognition, and thank him for all he has done for the Murray Bridge community and for rural doctors everywhere.”

**Dr Rischbieth said:** “I feel very honoured to receive this Award and am very lucky to have had such tremendous support over many years from my wife Mandy, sons Will and Tom and wider family, and my friends and colleagues at Bridge Clinic and the Murray Bridge Soldiers Memorial Hospital.

“Rural practice is one of the most rewarding medical careers in so many ways that anyone can follow.

“I had one of the best career opportunities that anyone training for Rural Medicine could have – strong rural role models, including my father and uncle, plus a great mentor in my local GP as well as enthusiastic medical supervisors who inspired me during my training.

“I have had the privilege of serving Murray Bridge, which like many country towns is a community of people with many varied and complex conditions – I can safely say I have never been bored.

“Out of so many rewarding moments during my career, a real highlight has been providing continuous care for members of the same family – from delivering their newborn babies to providing quality end of life care to their great grandparents...but it really is hard to choose just one highlight from what has been a career full of special moments.”

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**Dr Peter Rischbieth is available for interview.**

**Media contact** - Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890.

**Photo of Dr Rischbieth** - [www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/2170](http://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/2170)

**Photo of Dr Rischbieth with his Award** - [www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/2189](http://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/2189)

**Photo of Dr Rischbieth receiving his Award from RDAA President, Dr Megan Belot** - [www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/2176](http://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/2176)