

# A different training experience

A new regional hub for Trainees aims to attract surgeons to a way of life

In a country as vast as Australia, the provision of health services in regional areas has always brought unique rewards and challenges. General Surgeons in these cities and towns play a pivotal role in the health service and often make valuable contributions in many other areas of community life. However recruiting professionals to regional areas can be difficult and a gap is appearing in the surgical workforce throughout non-metropolitan areas of Australia.

In an effort to address this problem, The General Surgeons Australia (GSA) Victorian and Tasmanian Regional Sub-committee of the Board of General Surgery has recently approved the establishment of the first-ever Victorian regional training hub for general surgery. Using the principle that people trained in regional areas are more likely to remain or return to regional areas, the new hub will involve four regional hospitals: Geelong, Ballarat, Warrnambool and Hamilton. Metropolitan partnerships are being developed with St Vincent's Hospital and the Alfred Hospital, providing further specialised rotations.

The new training hub – called the South West Victorian Regional Hub – will begin next year, in 2013.

According to Geelong general surgeon Mr Glenn Guest, two SET1 Trainees have already been allocated to begin their training through the Hub next year with plans for up to 12 Trainees per year to be trained under the model by 2018.

He said the proposal was initiated by the general surgeons from across all four regional hospitals and has been strongly supported by other regional general surgeons throughout Australia.

"The latest workforce survey by the College reveals more than a dozen positions remain unfilled in regional Australia and the predictions from this survey estimate that in Victoria alone, 3.5 surgeons will retire each year from regional health services," he said.



"This situation has the potential to widen the gap between medical services available to people in regional Australia compared to their metropolitan counterparts.

"With the premise that training people in the regional areas may lead to more surgeons staying in those areas, the GSA's sub-committee and the College approved the setup of this new regional training hub."

Mr Guest said Melbourne's St Vincent's Hospital was one of the central support pillars of the initiative, and has agreed to act as metropolitan partner to provide the crucial support for Trainees to get exposure to tertiary and quaternary surgical specialties while offering rotations across the regional training hub to its own Trainees.

He said the Alfred Hospital will provide rotations within its world-class trauma unit to regional Trainees.

"The support of St Vincent's in particular has been crucial in getting this initiative off the ground and we believe the partnership will boost the training of both city and regional surgeons to the benefit of future patients," Mr Guest said.

"For the first time it allows Victorian regional surgeons to take direct ownership of surgical training while allowing Trainees to take more direct control of their careers."

Mr Guest said that until now, all surgical Trainees under the current SET program had to be attached to a training hub led by a major metropolitan hospital which, while offering excellent training, had the potential to discourage Trainees from considering regional areas for their long-term professional futures.

"Most Trainees are exposed to working in regional areas and very much enjoy these rotations. They get a taste of a surgical career outside the city where they work with surgeons who have a fulfilling and challenging professional career balanced with lifestyle opportunities sometimes not available in metropolitan areas," he said.

"Yet, by the time they have finished their training many younger surgeons have already begun laying down roots in the city with the demands of children, schools and the professional commitments of partners. This makes it more difficult to then relocate their families to a regional area.

"We believe that by making this training available to young doctors who already have a connection to regional life or a desire to create one, they may not have to face such a difficult choice.

"With the graduates of Deakin University Medical School in Geelong now taking up positions as doctors throughout Victoria, this initiative will allow those and many others to centre themselves in this area for their training.

"The challenge of reversing the workforce shortage is multifactorial, but the regional hub does have the potential to remove one major hurdle."

Mr Guest also acknowledged the support of Mr Matthew Croxford and Mr Sayed Hassen, the current and past Chairs of the Victorian and Tasmanian Regional Sub-committee and Ballarat surgeon Mr Bruce Stewart, for their hard work in helping to bring the Hub to fruition.

He also thanked the Boards of the GSA and the College for their strong support.

He said he expected general surgeons in other States and Territories to watch the roll-out and development of the new hub with interest.

"The sub-committee has taken this forward looking step knowing full well that this is not the only solution to the problem of regional Australia's workforce shortages; however, we do believe it has the potential to make a substantial difference in the long term," Mr Guest said.

"We look forward to the first Trainees beginning their surgical careers next year and future Trainees calling the South West Victorian region home, and inspiring them to continue their career in regional centres across Australia.

"With so many job opportunities now on the horizon we would also encourage all Trainees to consider a career in regional Australia where a surgeon can balance a fulfilling and successful career with time to enjoy a family and outside interests while providing their valuable skills to people in need."

*With Karen Murphy*

## Royal Australasian College of Surgeons 2014 Rowan Nicks Pacific Islands Scholarship & 2014 Rowan Nicks International Scholarship

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons invites suitable applicants for the 2014 Rowan Nicks Scholarships. These are the most prestigious of the College's International Awards and are directed at surgeons who are destined to become leaders in their home countries.

The Scholarships provide opportunities for surgeons to develop their management, leadership, teaching and clinical skills through clinical attachments in selected hospitals in Australia, New Zealand or South-East Asia.

Applicants for the Rowan Nicks International and Pacific Islands Scholarships must:

- commit to return to their home country on completion of their Scholarship;
- meet the English Language Requirement for medical registration in Australia or New Zealand (equivalent to an IELTS score of 7.0 in every category);
- hold a Master of Medicine in Surgery, or his/her country's post-graduate qualification in surgery. However, consideration will be given to applicants who have completed local general post-graduate surgical training, where appropriate to the needs of their home country.
- be under 45 years of age at the closing date for applications.

Applicants for the International Scholarship must be a citizen of one of the nominated countries listed on the College website from December 2012.

Applicants for the Pacific Islands Scholarship must be a citizen of the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu or Vanuatu;

### Selection Criteria

- The Committee will consider the potential of the applicant to become a surgical leader in the country of origin, and/or to supply a much-needed service in a particular surgical discipline.
- The Committee must be convinced that the applicant is of high calibre in surgical ability, ethical integrity and qualities of leadership.
- Selection will primarily be based on merit, with applicants providing an essential service in remote areas, without opportunities for institutional support or educational facilities, being given earnest consideration.

**Value:** Up to \$36,000 pro-rata, plus one return economy airfare from home country

**Tenure:** 3 - 12 months

Application forms and instructions will be available from the College website from December 2012: [www.surgeons.org](http://www.surgeons.org)  
Closing date: 5pm Monday 6 May, 2013. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application by 30 October 2013.

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