Exceptional Victorian rural doctor receives “highest honour” for lifetime’s work

Dr Mike Moynihan, an inspirational Rural Generalist doctor from Swan Hill in Victoria, has had a lifetime commitment to Rural Medicine, his peers and rural patients recognised, receiving the ACRRM-RDAA Pete Graham ‘Cohuna’ Award for 2017.

The Award is the highest honour that can be bestowed by the rural doctor community, and is awarded jointly by the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) in recognition of service of the highest order over many decades.

Dr Moynihan received the Award at a gala dinner for the Rural Medicine Australia 2017 conference, held in Melbourne on Friday night.

ACRRM President, Professor Ruth Stewart, said: “Mike is incredibly deserving of this Award. He has been a true foundation of Rural Medicine in Victoria for decades, alongside the very doctor after whom this Award is named — the late Dr Peter Graham.

“There are few, if any, doctors who have devoted more time over their career to advocating for their peers and rural and remote patients.

“Mike has been a strong supporter of ACRRM since it's inception. He was involved in the development of the College’s initial curriculum and has been a long-time proponent of ACRRM in Victoria.

“For over 30 years, Mike has provided General Practice and hospital care for Swan Hill and its outlying communities, in one of the more remote parts of Victoria. He has often carried a heavy on-call burden in times of doctor shortage.

“Before moving to Victoria, he was a dedicated doctor in Papua New Guinea — where he and his wife Amber, a nurse, formed a close and effective medical team. Once in Victoria, he practised solo in Wycheproof before moving to Nyah West and then Swan Hill.

“Mike has been heavily engaged in medical education and training in Swan Hill, including for medical students and GP Registrars. He has also trained many International Medical Graduates (IMGs), providing his time and expertise freely to assist with their training and exam preparation.

“For many years, Mike has also been the sole prescriber of methadone for the Swan Hill region — which comes with it a significant commitment to the ongoing welfare of patients who rely on this treatment.

“Mike is extremely deserving of this highest honour, and it is particularly poignant that he is receiving the Award named in memory of Dr Peter Graham, with whom Mike was a close friend and colleague.”

Outgoing RDAA President, Dr Ewen McPhee, said: “Mike is a true icon of Rural Medicine in Victoria. His commitment to his patients, fellow doctors, other health professionals, and Rural Medicine itself, is second to none.

“One of his truly great achievements has been his tireless advocacy work on behalf of Victoria's rural doctors and patients, especially during his many years as President of the Rural Doctors Association of Victoria (RDAV). In this role, he followed closely in the footsteps of Dr Peter Graham.
“Mike served as RDAV President for nine years, and was well known for his willingness to provide advice and assistance to fellow rural doctors, registrars and medical students.

“He contributed countless weeks of his own time over many years as RDAV President. This included frequently taking blocks of time out of his own busy practice to travel to Melbourne to meet with Victorian Ministers, Shadow Ministers and state health bureaucrats to try to save rural medical services from closure.

“He was also instrumental in having the Victorian Government fund and establish a Rural Generalist Training program for Victoria, to help deliver a new generation of rural doctors for the state.

“Supported by Mike, Amber was President of the Rural Medical Family Network in Victoria for ten years, and the support and camaraderie it provided to countless rural medical families. Mike and Amber also provided incredibly valuable support to many IMG families across rural Victoria, at a time when these families were far away from their own countries and trying to settle in to isolated rural communities.

“Mike’s contribution to Rural Medicine, his peers and rural patients across Victoria is truly remarkable. We warmly congratulate him on this very special Award. We also recognise the wonderful partnership that he and Amber have had both in life and, as a close-knit team, providing medical care to thousands of patients in PNG and rural Victoria.”

Dr Moynihan said: “Amber and I married in 1973 in the UK, after both travelling overseas. I’d volunteered in Morocco, Biafra and East Africa, and Amber had worked in South African hospitals.

"Our time in PNG was ‘deep end’ stuff — for our first post, there were three doctors in a 180 bed hospital. I did the medical work and obstetrics, and Amber got going with Maternal and Child Health clinics. After a year we went solo in Laiagam, which needed a doctor to cover 60,000 people — so there was plenty to do. Amber got the Maternal and Child Health clinics fixed and after the Census we worked out we had over 90% immunised!

“After a number of years, and great experiences, we had to look at the future. We moved to Australia and spent three years at our solo practice in Wycheproof, before I took up a post at the Bush Nursing Hospital at Nyah West for ten years, where we ran the clinic together. Then it was on to Swan Hill.

“Early on, Peter Graham got me involved in positions on various bodies which, he said, also required me to be on the Rural Doctors Association of Victoria (RDAV) Management Committee! That was the start of a long but wonderful association with RDAV and its rural doctor members across Victoria.

"It's a tremendous honour to receive this Award, and it means a lot to me. I was a great admirer of Peter Graham, who was also a friend and mentor. Like me, he could not have achieved what he did without the fortitude and support of his wife, Annie, who came to the Awards dinner with Amber and I.

“My happiest moments in medicine have been working with Amber in isolated general practice, and of course caring for our communities and terrific patients. I have also been very grateful for the camaraderie and support afforded by my peers and colleagues over many decades.

“It's been a wonderful journey, and although I have just retired I am still close to the rural medical community and our new thriving rural generalist clinic and medical school campus at Swan Hill Hospital. The rural doctor movement has been at the centre of our lives for so long. It has been an honour and a privilege. This community has become our community.”

A high resolution photograph of Dr Mike Moynihan is available by contacting Patrick Daley.

Available for interview:
Dr Mike Moynihan (via Patrick Daley)
Outgoing RDAA President, Dr Ewen McPhee (via Patrick Daley and Ineke Kuiper)
ACRRM President, Professor Ruth Stewart (via Rachelle Forbes)

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