

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## RESEARCH FINDINGS COULD INJECT LIFE INTO RURAL HEALTH SERVICES

A new research report released by a GP training organisation offers insights that could help to reinvigorate the availability of medical services in rural areas.

The report, "*GP proceduralists; the hidden heart of rural and regional health in Australia*" was commissioned by Bogong Regional Training Network ([www.bogong.org.au](http://www.bogong.org.au))

GP proceduralists are GPs who also actively practice anaesthetics, obstetrics and surgery.

Bogong Chief Executive, Ms Nicki Melville said attracting, skilling and retaining GP proceduralists is an important part of health care in rural communities.

"Our research revealed substantial levels of demand for GP procedural medicine in small rural and regional communities. It also highlighted a gradual but sustained decline in the volume and complexity of all categories of procedural practice, particularly as the workforce of GP proceduralists age and retire," said Ms Melville.

The report findings contained a key surprise.

Although GP proceduralists are vital to the rural health care system, they are effectively 'hidden' as they are not recognized or counted as a distinct cohort.

Bogong Board member and Associate Professor, Dr Graeme Jones encouraged hospitals, universities and government agencies to use the report findings to plan for the future.

"We need to provide sufficient elective lists at rural hospitals to ensure GP proceduralists have enough work to maintain their skills. We also need to examine the feasibility of GP proceduralists being trained to assume responsibility for minor procedures currently being performed by visiting specialists," he said.

Dr Jones stressed the need to maintain a critical mass of GPs and GP proceduralists in rural practice.

"We need to increase the number and type of procedural training posts available in rural areas and create new strategies for succession planning."

Current reforms in the health sector provide opportunities to implement recommendations contained in the 'Hidden Heart' report.

"Although it is complex, there are strong levels of goodwill around this issue," concluded Nicki Melville.

"GPs want to use their procedural skills, communities want access to them and government is funding more training places. It's clear that we need to work together to find more flexible arrangements that will help us to attract and retain GP proceduralists in our rural communities."

Dr Graeme Jones from Bogong Regional Training Network will present the findings of the 'Hidden Heart' research at the national General Practice & Education training convention in Adelaide next week ( Wednesday, 2 September).

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### Interviews/photos:

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