**Provincial Surgeons of Australia (PSA)**

**Annual Scientific Meeting**

**MacKay - 11-13 August 2022**

**Reflections from Trainees and junior doctors on the PSA Conference**

**Dr Lash Wickramasuriya**

**SET 5 Queensland**

PSA 2022 brought with it a return to Mackay, where I had been posted for my first year of surgical training as a baby-faced SET 2 registrar. With it brought many fond memories. As a first-year training registrar in a regional setting you are immediately thrust into the spotlight that comes with suddenly being responsible for managing your clinical team, residents and consultants included. Ensuring that patients are cared for in the respective ways and nuances of each individual personality but knowing that you are backed by a leadership group that had the patient’s best interests at heart.

It’s an odd feeling going from the PHO that was asking the training registrar to help with a difficult appendix to being the one being called upon to help only a week later. But it was all made easier knowing that the consultants at the Mackay Base Hospital were all supportive in your efforts to learn by doing whilst all the while keeping a watchful eye from across the corner to ensure patient safety was kept as the utmost priority.

The return to Mackay also brought back fond memories of bonds and friendships forged in a small regional hospital that will last a lifetime, with the comradeship formed during difficult and stressful periods, to being involved in exciting operations, learning off each other and of course the fun-filled adventures of exploring Mackay, The Dispensary and the surrounds.

I was glad I was able to go back this year to see old friends, colleagues and mentors whilst enjoying an immensely educational scientific program filled with experts and international speakers that highlighted the ongoing importance and challenges faced by the rural and regional general surgeon in Australia.

Mackay for the win.

**Dr Andrew FitzDowse**

**SET 5 Victoria**

After a 2-year hiatus from in person events, I was excited to be able to attend the 2022 PSA ASC. As my first PSA conference, it did not disappoint. As well as offering an opportunity to escape the dreary Victorian winter to the lovely area of Mackay, the conference was an ideal mix of practical surgical information, as well as a reminder of the friendly nature of rural surgeons.The educational program of the three-day event offered lectures on a range of surgical topics relevant to rural as well as metropolitan surgery. These talks were embedded with pearls of information that I wish I had received prior sitting the fellowship exam. Certain lectures seemed almost direct answers to the most recent long written exam questions, regarding complications in bariatric surgery and total neoadjuvant therapy in rectal cancer.

Of particular note was the amazing talks given by the guest speaker Dr Todd Heniford. A world leader in hernia surgery research, it was amazing to meet the developer of the CEDAR App I’ve been using on my phone for a number of years! The ability to get practical tips and tricks for complex hernia management, from such an inspiring surgeon, was unrivalled.

Complementing the exceptional speakers, was an amazing social program. The highlight being the Gala Dinner held at Note Park Grazing Co. These events exemplified the community that the PSA fosters and offered an opportunity to begin developing a rural support network for my future practice.

I would highly recommend attendance at future PSA conferences.

**Dr Brianne (Bree) Lauritz**

**SET 4 Victoria**

The Provincial Surgeons of Australia (PSA) Annual Scientific Meeting was held in MacKay this year. It was a great opportunity for metropolitan, regional and rural surgeons to gather in person after the last 2 years. MacKay was a great choice for location with its warm winter weather and natural beauty and wildlife.

Regional and rural speakers spoke about their subspecialty interests, with sessions focusing on colorectal, hepatobiliary, breast and hernia surgery. International speakers included Dr Kevin Higa and Dr Todd Heniford. Kevin Higa gave us virtual presentations on updates and complications in bariatric surgery. Todd Heniford visited MacKay and inspired us to analyse our complications as he spoke about how his complications have changed his management approach to hernia repairs throughout the years. The free papers sessions allowed junior doctors and medical students to showcase their research.

The RACS Rural Coach Dr Damian Fry gave us a special talk detailing his career pathway from the military to becoming a surgeon. He emphasised his enjoyment of rural rotations during his training and the variety of experiences encountered being a rural surgeon. Multiple social events were arranged which created a relaxed environment to connect with our colleagues. It was a well organised and enjoyable conference. I look forward to next year’s PSA!

**Tzu-Yi (Arron) Chuang**

**SET 2 Queensland**

Thank you to General Surgeons Australia (GSA) for the 2022 PSA ASC conference. Early in the year I was in Mackay as a General Surgical Registrar and there was a sense of pride in seeing the 2022 PSA ASC conference being held in such a wonderful location and to such a high standard.

The conference itself was an amazing experience with a range of outstanding speakers covering a wide range of topics including bariatric, hepato-pancreatico-biliary, hernia repair, colorectal and also breast cancer management. It was a great learning experience and what was especially helpful was the way the presentations were orientated towards managing surgical emergencies in the rural setting which is one of the main aims of the PSA conference! It was wonderful listening to Associate Professor Kellee Slater, one of our own Australian pioneer hernia specialists, on her experience and approach in complex abdominal wall reconstruction and hernia repair. Dr. Pranavan Palamuthusingam, the young hepato-pancreatico-biliary surgeon from Royal Brisbane Woman Hospital, had updated us the new update of Barcelona guideline for hepatocellular carcinoma management. Dr. Scott Whiting, the upper gastrointestinal surgeon from Townsville hospital, had also provided his approach to manage the bariatric surgical complication in regional/rural setting. Dr. Damian Fry, a general surgeon from Toowoomba Hospital, had shared his rural training experience and how he became a regional hospital surgeon. In addition to speeches from surgeons, there were also vascular surgeon, radiologist, medical oncologist, and dietician to share their knowledge with us.

The social events were also a highlight to provide us a platform to meet new friends. I really enjoyed the opportunity of returning to Mackay and seeing my old colleagues and mentors at the conference both from Mackay as well as from other parts of Queensland. I would like to thank all PSA staffs and sponsors for their hard works to make this conference wonderful.

**Dr William McSweeney**

**GSET 1 Queensland**

As a Queensland-based trainee completing a regional term, attending the ASC was invaluable to continue to develop my understanding of the place “rural surgery” plays in surgical care. I found the sessions particularly engaging both in terms of relatable general surgical content (e.g. melanoma, hernia, bariatric complications) that I can apply in practice, but also in hearing from metropolitan-based experts in these fields. It was these talks by surgical subspecialists from larger centres that were so appealing and gave an impression of connection between the regional practice of general surgery, and the referral centres we are so often speaking with.

The social events were a particular highlight and offered an opportunity to speak with trainees and to reconnect with surgeons I had worked for in prior years and “catch up” in an informal setting. It impressed upon me a sense of community and mentorship, which is key in moulding how I think about future practice. The presentation by Dr Fry over lunch was a particularly meaningful and grounding insight into the challenges and opportunities of training, and something I found resonated with me.

I would strongly recommend the ASC to other junior doctors and would like to continue to attend as I progress through training.

**Dr Kevin Tree**

**JDOC New South Wales**

I landed in Mackay as a first-time visitor to both the region and PSA and was warmly welcomed by the weather, the people and the lively wildlife.

The scientific program contained rich academic sessions that covered a broad spectrum of topics, with my particular favourite the hernia session with Dr Todd Heniford and A/Prof Kellee Slater. As a surgical registrar it was fascinating to see the variety and complexity of hernia surgery and appreciate how specialised hernia surgery has evolved and become. Particularly inspiring was Dr Heniford’s presentation “Knowing enough to know we are wrong” which provided lessons in embracing complications, being transparent, and engaging in the audit cycle with research. These are lessons transferrable across all healthcare fields, that I will practise and carry into my career. The oral and poster presentations were a standout, with inspiring speeches reinforcing academia’s role in rural medicine to ensure equitable outcomes.

I can’t forget the social program, with a high-spirited Gala Dinner at Note Park Farm. Warm by the fire, dancing to local band “Mango Junction”, and tasting local cuisine and spirits, this was a standout event in my 2022.

PSA ASC 2022 was a fantastic conference in a great location and I would like to thank Dr Wendela Schimmer for convening. I am excited for the next PSA and hope to visit Mackay again.

**Dr Nevin Chen**

**JDOC Victoria**

I had the pleasure of attending PSA ASC 2022 and had a wonderful experience. Being my first time in beautiful Mackay, the gentle scenery of the town and relaxed atmosphere within the conference were welcoming. I was impressed with the speakers in the scientific program as the talks were engaging, varied and informative, whether they be in person or virtual. It was interesting to hear from local surgeons as well as international doctors on their areas of expertise and advancements in their subspecialty fields. I particularly enjoyed the hernia presentations. Aside from the guest speakers, the research posters and presentations from doctors around the country were a true display of the unique, complex challenges inherent to rural and regional surgery and the innovative ideas and solutions that arise from it. Through these discussions I have been inspired to pursue several projects of my own in my regional health care network. The social program also deserves a special mention, especially the thoroughly enjoyable gala dinner. My only regret was that I didn't have more time to explore Mackay.Overall PSA ASC was well organised and ran smoothly. I would highly recommend this conference to anyone with an interest in rural health. Many thanks to PSA for hosting a brilliant conference. I am very much looking forward to seeing what PSA has to offer next year.

**Dr Emma Robb**

**JDOC Queensland**

Truth be told, PSA Mackay = my first conference as a Doctor. In 5 years, this has been the only conference I have been able to co-ordinate leave to attend.

I arrived in Mackay 5:30pm on Wednesday the 10th July all bright eyed and busy tailed, to find no Ubers operational and the traditional bus to town at the bus stop, no eftpos “only cash love”. I fumbled around in my bag and found my wallet and opened this zip compartment along with some moths, $3.80 in coins sat in the pouch, for the $2.80 fair to town. I couldn’t believe my luck, I assumed I was going to have to dash to the atm and not make it back in time for the bus. There was something humbling about my no go card, no eftpos, no pay pass experience and I found my seat.

I can’t say I slept much the first night, but the walk to the Mackay Conference centre and quick stop off the coffee shop sorted out my heavy eyes. Just another day of tiredness, a feeling we learn to embrace and recognise the comfort in familiarity as a Surgical Registrar, but I am sure this continues throughout a Surgeons’ life. The 6:45am breakfast symposium of Thursday stared Dr Kelvin Higa, where he talked about his new research and the switch from purple to gold or white cartridges for bariatric surgery and there hasn’t been any evidence of ischemia, as originally thought. We also heard again from him throughout the conference about complications in bariatric surgery. We heard from our much relied on radiologist colleagues on a range of topics CT colon scopes, PET scan and melanoma, MRI in rectal cancer staging. Friday morning Dr Todd Heniford discussed complex incisional hernias, patient preparation and the long journey to operation to do it right the first time. We had a whole program of thrilling and capturing talks from a range of Inspiring Specialists. Many free papers about a range of different and interesting topics. We were well catered for, let’s be honest everyone is always pleased and satisfied when there is good food. The social outings were also showcasing what Mackay has on offer, Lunch at Dolphin Head, Dinner at the surf club: watch out for the crocodile and the wonderful, dreamy outdoor event at Note Farm. Saturday, was time to set foot back to reality and head home.

Thank you Mackay, Thank you PSA.

**Dr Hannah Tang**

**JDOC Queensland**

The PSA ASC was held in the town of Mackay this year. When I heard my abstract was accepted for a poster presentation, I was excited to visit this quaint town I had heard so much about from my Far North Queensland colleagues.

Arriving into Mackay, I was immediately greeted with the warm humid air and stories about local sporting heroes down the airport hall of fame. For a small town with a population of 4000 people, it seemed to sprawl on forever along the river and beach.

Day 1 of the conference kicked off with speakers providing the latest updates on topics like CT colonography, hepatocellular carcinoma and breast cancer. A particular highlight for me was the sensational and inspiring talk by Associate Professor Kellee Slater about complex incisional hernias. Interesting short talks by my colleagues about their own research followed and the day ended with a fun dinner and trivia at the local surf club which provided a great place for networking.

Day 2 started with breakfast with the animated Dr Todd Heniford talking about his own experience with incisional hernias in the United States followed again by interesting diverse subspecialty topics. The gala dinner that night was a blast with sights and sounds to behold and opportunities to network with industry too. Unfortunately for myself, I had to leave before the start of Day 3 to catch a flight back home but I look forward to attending another PSA in the near future.

**Dr Karar Nasser**

**JDOC Victoria**

As a Surgical Resident interested providing care to rural and regional patients, I have been fortunate to attend the Provincial Surgeons of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting. This year it was held at the Mackay Convention and Exhibition Centre. The weather provided a warm welcome on my arrival from Bendigo, Victoria.
The engaging talks provided the latest evidence on managing on common presentations to surgeons working outside metropolitan cities. I had been given multiple perspectives on the management of breast cancer from a multi-disciplinary team. Followed by specialist advice on managing complex incisional hernias from A/Prof Kellee Slater. Unique perspectives were given on the adaptations to manage emergencies without the resources and specialty input of tertiary hospitals. These included the management of vascular emergencies, complications of bariatric surgery, fixations of rib fractures all within a regional centre.  The conference was kept engaging with Q&A panels, and paper presentations in between the updates.

The welcome dinner and Gala Dinner were hosted at stunning venues with local live music entertainment. As a junior doctor in training, I was very warmly welcomed and included by the senior surgeons throughout the conference, and the social events. The rural coach project has enabled me to network and connect with mentors. I look forward to attending the conference next year and I would encourage my fellow junior doctors to attend future conferences.

**Dr Michelle Ward**

**JDOC Queensland**

Warm sunny days can be hard to find in the depths of winter, but not when you are in north Queensland. With daytime temperatures up around 23 degrees, Mackay felt like the ideal place to be in August and provided an excellent setting for the 2022 PSA Annual Scientific Conference.

After a couple of years of COVID delays it was great to be finally able to catch up with our rural colleagues in the flesh, coming from all around Australia as well as a few special guests all the way from the USA.

The academic program covered a broad range of topics particularly relevant to the regional and rural surgeon including hernias, obesity, breast, colorectal, vascular and melanoma; with particular highlights including amazing insights into advances in complex abdominal wall hernias from experienced and renowned surgeons Dr Todd Heniford from the US and Dr Kellee Slater from closer to home here in Australia.

Rural people are known to be a friendly sort and the delegates of the 2022 PSA Conference were no exception. The design of both the social and academic programs offered ample opportunities to catch up with old friends as well as making many new ones.

Despite the trivia night being slightly biased towards Mackay locals and those of Belgian heritage, thanks to the hard work of conference organiser Wendella Schimmer, a good night was had by all. No rural surgical conference would be complete without a gala dinner at a cattle ranch with a fantastic turn out on the dance floor. Given the great success of the 2022 PSA ASC I can’t wait to see what will be in store for the next!

**David Toro Tolle**

**JDOC Northern Territory**

I’m incredibly grateful to the GSA Rural Coach Grant for supporting me in making the trip to the PSA Conference recently held in Mackay (QLD). I live and work in Darwin, and the journey to Mackay is certainly not a short one. As someone who is interested in rural general surgery, and surgical research in rural/remote Australia, I knew this trip would be an excellent opportunity to learn and connect. I was given the opportunity to present on real-time research I’m conducting with Dr Richard Bradbury. We are currently exploring optimal (and most evidence- based) surgical technique to treat carbuncles – a condition disproportionately affecting rural/remote Australians. I really appreciated feedback and insight from other attendees, and the overwhelmingly positive response to our study. I left Mackay feeling enriched with both new ideas and knowledge, as well as colleagues.

This was also my first time in Mackay, and I had an incredible time sight-seeing. I immersed myself in the local nature at Cape Hillsborough and Eungella National Park, and was lucky enough to see my first wild platypus swimming, a memory I’ll never forget.

I’m very fortunate to live and practice in the Northern Territory. However, the distance between major cities can be constraining in terms of time and finances. As such, I’d like to personally extend a thank you to the GSA Rural Coach Grant for making this trip to Mackay possible.

**Dr Laura Bennett**

**JDOC Victoria**

What a privilege it was to attend the Provincial Surgeons Australia Annual Scientific Conference in sunny Mackay this August. I made the lengthy journey from Horsham, Victoria to Mackay, Queensland and the convenors certainly made it worthwhile. The atmosphere upon my arrival to the presentation hall was warm, welcoming and one of comradery. As I waited nervously to begin my oral presentation I enjoyed presentations from experts in the field on topics such as chemoprophylaxis in the obese patient and vascular surgery in the rural setting. My own presentation was received warmly and any nerves I may have had were dissipated by the friendly crowd of surgeons. That night we reconvened at the Gala Dinner at a local farm. It was a wonderful night of firepits, delicious food, great music and excellent networking on a backdrop of stunning Mackay stars on a clear night. The following morning the excellent sessions continued with presentations on rib fracture fixation in the rural setting, the challenge of surgical outreach programs and pregnancy and parental leave in surgery. PSA ASC 2022 was an excellent experience that cemented my aspirations to become a rural general surgeon. It is easy to feel apprehensive regarding the isolation of working rurally however the ASC reminded me that there is a powerful network of like-minded surgeons out there and it offers a valuable opportunity to convene, connect and share knowledge and experience each year. I look forward to PSA ASC 2023!

**Dr Suzannah Dewhurst**

**JDOC New South Wales**

The Provincial Surgeons of Australia meeting held in Mackay in August 2022 was a fantastic mixture of innovative ideas and research in various surgical specialties. The conference was a highlight of my professional learning this year due to the combination of medical teaching and interactions with other unaccreted registrars, trainees, and rural or regional general surgeons.

Coming from a centre with bariatric, colorectal, and vascular surgery, day 2 of the conference was particularly relevant to the surgery I am exposed to daily. The conference was fantastic for taking away everyday learning points, for example DVT prophylaxis dosing recommendations, whilst concurrently opening my eyes to various surgical techniques I have not been exposed to. Meeting other unaccredited trainees with similar goals and interests was a great way to engage with people beyond my own hospital. It was great to hear other people’s experiences in regional centres, as well as their ambitions and predictions for where general surgery is headed. Similarly, it was fantastic to be able to discuss various aspects of my own presentation with consultants from other centres, to compare resources and ideas for further research.

I thoroughly enjoyed my GSA Mackay 2022 experience, and very much look forward to being a part of the conference again at Margaret River in 2023.

**Dr Jessica (Jess) Paynter**

**JDOC Victoria**

My name is Jess and I am a junior doctor currently working in Bendigo, VIC. I attended the PSA ASC 2022 conference in Mackay to meet, socialise and learn from rural general surgeons across Australia and like-minded junior doctor's working across Australia. I was able to experience the tropics of FNQ and present some of rural general surgical research. It was great to meet other junior Doctors from Darwin, Wagga Wagga and FNQ at the conference. I particularly liked the vascular surgery and breast surgery presentations. It was great to meet and hear from senior leaders in the rural general sphere. This was my first PSA conference, and I look forward to hopefully exploring the beautiful Margaret River region next year at PSA 2023. It is a conference I would definitely recommend for junior doctors and medical students looking at a career in rural general surgery. I attended the conference with colleagues from Bendigo, but it's a very welcoming conference with plenty of opportunities to meet new peers and friends. Thanks very much to the Mackay team for organising a fantastic conference and for the rural surgical group for supporting this initiative.