

# Rural Health

*Latest news and updates*

## Chair's Message

I extend a warm greeting to all our Section members. Rural health remains a goal of the RACS Council. The Rural Surgery Section committee tabled its paper on the '[Select for Rural](#)' Initiative, the first part of its strategic plan, to the [Board of Surgical Education and Training](#) meeting held on 12 June and subsequently to the June [Education Board](#) meeting. The presentation of the Rural Surgery Section committee's strategy was further acknowledged by the [Council](#) at its the June meeting.

Each Training Board has been asked to report back on the extent to which they will adopt the initiatives, and if not then why not. Discussion by the Education Board ensured there is high level input and support for the Select for Rural Initiative. RACS are investigating and reviewing options on how RACS and its portfolios can best address the equitable distribution of the surgical workforce. The Rural Surgery Section committee are presently working on recommendations for the 'Train for Rural' Initiative, which forms the second part of the strategic plan.

It is widely known that the communities in Alice Springs and NT at large are under-served and the health services have struggled with recruiting talent. With the long-standing surgeon Dr Jacob on the verge of retiring, an exciting specialist consultant vacancy at Alice Springs Hospital to join the Surgical Department has arisen. The role description is detailed [below](#). Applicants interested in 3, 6- or 12-months stints are welcome, though long term recruitment is most preferred. It is a great opportunity for younger general surgery Fellows to consider since overseas fellowships may not be as readily available due to COVID-19.

While the infection has been largely kept at bay from our rural, regional and remote communities, state & border forced closures have impacted our border towns. The COVID-19 flare-ups in Victoria and NSW are a stark reminder that the pandemic is not behind us. As we readjust to the new normal, the RACS information hub has up-to-date information and resources for wellbeing and mental health. These are [listed below](#) for your convenience.

Lastly I encourage you to [contact me](#) to let me know about your local challenges or successes in your area. This will allow me to advocate and help where possible or share successes for the benefit of all.



**Dr Bridget Clancy MBBS FRACS GAICD**

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## **New Australian National Rural Health Commissioner**

Associate Professor Ruth Stewart is the new National Rural Health Commissioner, replacing Professor Paul Worley who started in 2017. Associate Professor Stewart has a wealth of knowledge needed for advancing rural health outcomes, having served as past president for ACRRM and RDAA, and worked as GP proceduralist in South West Victoria. We welcome and congratulate her appointment and look forward to collaborating on

policies addressing patient centred surgical care for the rural, regional and remote communities we serve in Australia.



*Associate Professor Ruth Stewart*

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## **2020 Section Annual Business Meeting**

The RSS Annual Business Meeting was held over Zoom for the first time on Monday 29 June 2020. The meeting minutes can now be viewed on RACS [eCommittees](#) (login required).

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## **Alice Springs Hospital vacancy for a specialist consultant**

Alice Springs Hospital has an exciting position for a Specialist interested in surgery that specialises in the care of Aboriginal people in a remote environment. The role will have an interesting broad mixture of trauma and elective general surgery. For application or

questions please contact: [Dr Jacob Jacob](#) (Director of the Surgical Unit). More information on the job description can be read [here](#).

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## Listen to the latest RACS Podcasts and Webinars Recordings



*Image of Ballarat Town Hall, Victoria*

### **RACS Post Op podcast: *A migrant's journey to practice in regional Victoria***

When general surgeon Dr Ruth Bollard migrated to Australia from England in 2006, she chose Victoria's regional city of Ballarat to establish her own practice. She says rural and regional areas like Ballarat offer terrific lifestyle opportunities. Dr Bollard would like to encourage more medical specialists to consider regional and rural areas, which can offer fulfilling professional opportunities too. [Listen online](#)

## Telehealth and Digital Prescribing



RACS hosted webinars on telehealth and digital prescribing for all RACS members. It covers telehealth in practice with a presentation by Dr Bridget Clancy, Chair of the Rural Surgery Section, as well as advocacy work being undertaken by RACS in telehealth which is being led by Prof Mark Frydenberg, Chair of the new Sustainability in Healthcare Working Group. Other speakers include the Australian Digital Health Agency and AVANT.

[Listen here](#)

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RACS is keeping Fellows, Trainees, IMGs and prevocational stakeholders up-to-date with the latest developments and information pertaining to COVID-19, surgical education and beyond.

Here are links to some of the earlier webinars:

**COVID-19 webinar focusing on Personal Protective Equipment (21 April 2020)**

This webinar featured Australian Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Dr Nick Coatsworth.

[View the recording](#)

**COVID-19 & Surgical Trainees: Your Questions Answered (7 May 2020)**

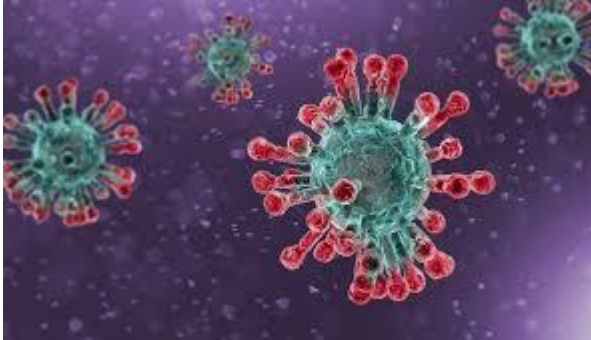
[View the recording](#)

**COVID-19: Pre-SET & Early Exams (28 May 2020)**

[View the recording](#)

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## RACS COVID-19 Information Hub



RACS have set up a central repository of COVID-19 information, resources and updates about the COVID-19 pandemic. We encourage our surgical colleagues to refer to our [COVID-19 information hub](#) for updates and recommended guidelines.

## Resources from Specialty Societies and Associations

We have been working closely as One College with our Specialty Surgical Societies and Associations on communicating specialty specific updates. This information is available at [RACS COVID-19 Information Hub Specialty society communications](#).

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## Free COVID-19 Mental Health Wellbeing Support

We acknowledge that this crisis may have significant impacts on your physical and mental health and wellbeing, with increased risk of illness and burnout. Please look after your own health. RACS have partnered with [Converge International](#) to provide confidential support to surgeons and their immediate family members.

In Australia the government has introduced a number of digital mental health support services:

- The [headtohealth.gov.au](http://headtohealth.gov.au) website contains a repository of digital mental health services
- The [Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service](#) and their counsellors are available to talk 24/7: 1800 512 348
- The [National Mental Health Commission's #InThisTogether](#) website contains mental wellbeing tips.

In New Zealand, free resources are available from the Mental Health Foundation. Individuals can access a free and confidential call and text service any time on 1737 to speak with a trained counsellor. More information is available at the [Mental Health Foundation Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) space](#).

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## Resources



RACS is committed to working with our partner organisations and stakeholder groups to effect positive change in rural health care.

Please email the [Rural Surgery Section](#) if you would like to inform us about any issues that you think we should be aware of, or contribute to our rural advocacy efforts in any way.

**Email the Rural Surgery Section:**

[Rural@surgeons.org](mailto:Rural@surgeons.org)

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