



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **A new type of general surgeon – rurally competent**

**Friday 7 May, 2010**

Delegates to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) have been told that one approach to overcoming the critical shortage of rural based general surgeons is to upskill city surgeons, rendering them 'rurally competent' and creating a much greater pool of locum surgeons.

Perth based surgical trainee Dr Ruth Blackham told delegates that the problems associated with training general surgeons beyond mainstream practice, and ensuring they can work effectively in a rural setting, are common to other specialties where a significant rural presence is required, notably orthopaedics and obstetrics. In all these specialties, current numbers in rural areas fall significantly short.

"One approach to addressing these shortages is to utilise current surgical workforce numbers and upskill them in primary areas of emergency surgery," Dr Blackham said. "A course aimed at enabling and encouraging 'city surgeons' to become 'rurally competent' would allow a far greater pool of locum surgeons to provide relief to their country counterparts."

Dr Blackham cited as an example an emergency surgery course conducted in Bunbury by the University of Western Australia over the weekend of 27-28 February this year. Aimed at surgical consultants and trainees, the inaugural course aimed to familiarise surgeons with the types of operations they may be required to perform in a rural setting. In addition to technical aspects, the course incorporated the medico-legal considerations associated with working outside a particular subspecialty.

"The course held in Bunbury could serve as a model for courses in other rural jurisdictions. Such a model could be an important part of a system which provides ongoing support for the permanent rural surgical workforce and which exposes city based surgeons to the challenges and charms of working in the bush," Dr Blackham said.

"Such courses are not in themselves the solution to the rural surgical workforce crisis, but they could well be a part of the solution."

Dr Blackham's presentation is one of hundreds at this year's ASC, covering all surgical specialties and aspects of surgical history and education. Nearly 2,000 delegates are expected to attend the ASC, which runs from 4 to 7 May and is being held at the Perth Convention Exhibition Centre. The ASC program is available online at [www.surgeons.org](http://www.surgeons.org)

**Media inquiries: Michael Barrett, Manager Media & PR Manager - 0429 028 933  
Ruth Charters, Senior Media & PR Officer - 0409 330 274**