

Saturday 15 October 2022

‘Dr Reggie’ recognised for dedicated service to Palm Island patients – and wider community

A Rural Generalist registrar who has provided dedicated care to the Queensland community of Palm Island is one of two recipients of the ACRRM-RDAA Rural Registrar of the Year Award 2022.

Dr Regina Waterhouse was presented with the award at the Rural Medicine Australia (RMA22) conference dinner in Canberra on Friday night.

She joins **Dr Salma Hanif**, a Fijian doctor who has delivered dedicated medical care to the remote NSW community of Boggabri, in receiving the Award this year.

The award is presented annually by the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) and Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA), and recognises an ACRRM Registrar who has demonstrated outstanding leadership and advocacy in the field of Rural and Remote Medicine.



Dr Waterhouse – or ‘Dr Reggie’ as she is affectionately known by her patients – has provided medical care on Palm Island for the past 18 months, after completing her obstetrics training in Cairns.

A proud descendent of the Thupmul (stingray) clan of Badu Island and Thabu (snake) clan of Saibai Island, she was born in Cairns and raised in Far North Queensland.

She initially worked in the community services and disability support sector before completing medical school as a mature age student.

She now works at both the local hospital and primary care clinic on Palm Island, where (amongst many other things) she provides a regular ‘focus clinic’ with midwives to deliver care to high risk patients and engage them in antenatal care.

Dr Waterhouse is known for her compassionate care and dedicated advocacy for her Palm Island patients, many of whom face significant disadvantage.

She is also an active ACRRM Council Member with the aim to improve health outcomes more widely for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Dr Waterhouse said: “I am a Torres Strait Islander, and by the time I had turned 20, I had already lost count of how many funerals I’d attended. I’d spent countless hours in clinic waiting rooms and from a young age helped my mother care for multiple family members with various chronic diseases.

“Although being fascinated by Medicine, the idea of actually being a doctor was such an alien concept it took quite a few years of doing other things before finally giving it a go. The decider was realising I could continue to rant about my frustration with the failings of the health system or I could be a part of change.

“For me, Rural Generalism makes sense. I've never been able to contain my interest to just one area of Medicine and the concept of cradle-to-grave care and everything in between fits with how I see the world.

“As a Torres Strait Islander woman, I cannot separate health into discrete systems because everything is connected. If the kidneys fail, you worry about the heart; if any individual is struggling you look at the family, then the community and the systems that are in play. You look at the past to understand how things are now and plan for the future. Rural doctors often do this intuitively – whether they realise it or not – and it's why I've found my place among them.”

ACRRM immediate past President, Dr Sarah Chalmers, said: “Regina demonstrates the very best attributes of Rural Generalism and the College, providing her community with the highest quality of healthcare. She is a strong and passionate advocate for Rural and Remote Medicine and provides an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare perspective on the ACRRM Council. She achieves all this while balancing family commitments and continuing to train towards Fellowship. I congratulate her on being awarded Rural Registrar of the Year.”

RDAA President, Dr Megan Belot added: “Regina is a great example of the next generation of Rural Generalist doctors – balancing not only the great service she is providing to her community, but also parenthood as the mother of two young children.

“She is a strong advocate for Rural Generalist Medicine as a career path, and is living her commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare, providing a crucial service to those living on Palm Island.

“We warmly congratulate her on receiving this year's Rural Registrar of the Year Award.”

Dr Regina Waterhouse is available for interview.

Photos of Dr Waterhouse are available here:

www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/2167

www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/2187 (Dr Waterhouse with her Award)

A high resolution photo of Dr Waterhouse receiving her award from ACRRM immediate past President, Dr Sarah Chalmers, is available here:

www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/2175

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