

Media release
18 September 2022



Iconic rural doctor and rising stars recognised in annual RDAT awards

An icon of the rural doctors movement, renowned not only for his commitment to Rural Medicine in Tasmania but more widely across Australia, has received the Tasmanian Rural Doctor of the Year Award 2022.

The Award is given annually by the Rural Doctors Association of Tasmania (RDAT) and was announced on Saturday night at the Official Dinner of the Tasmanian Rural Health Conference.

Professor Dennis Pashen retired recently after a more than 40 year career in Medicine, most recently working as a Rural Generalist doctor in Queenstown and as Ochre Health's Tasmanian Medical Coordinator.

"This highly-deserved Award recognises Dennis's tireless efforts in advocating for expanded rural medical training pathways – and for his enormous support of registrars, junior doctors and medical students – both in rural Tasmania and on the mainland" **RDAT's immediate past President, Dr Eve Merfield, said.**

"A dedicated Rural Generalist doctor with advanced skills in obstetrics, Dennis spent the majority of his career in rural Queensland in various roles including Director of Medical Services for the South Burnett and Rural Darling Downs regions.

"Since moving to Tasmania in 2006, he has advocated strongly for the development of the Rural Generalist training program in Tasmania and recruited numerous GPs and GP registrars to our State.

"He has also been a significant contributor to political advocacy, both in Tasmania and nationally, for better access to healthcare for rural and remote Australians and a sustainable health workforce for the bush.

"He is a former President of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) and the Rural Doctors Association of Tasmania (RDAT) – and in each of these roles has contributed significantly to positive outcomes for rural healthcare and rural Australians.

"He is a champion of Rural and Remote Medicine, and of quality and safety in healthcare, and numerous junior doctors have benefitted from his training and mentorship.

"He is highly deserving of this Award, and we warmly congratulate him on receiving it."

Professor Pashen said:

"I've been privileged to have worked in a variety of rural communities in a number of guises and have worked with many gifted and dedicated people, both in the health sector and in the communities that supported me.

"I enjoyed my time as President of ACRRM, RDAA and RDAT, and in the roles I have held on Boards supporting Rural Medicine. I am now a confirmed Tasmanian!

"As a kid from the bush, I have been lucky with my accidental journey across rural health – finding myself at the right place at the right time.

"I am extremely lucky to have met, worked with and married my wife Vicki Sheedy who, being much smarter than me, was my adviser, muse and co-worker through a large part of my career. Her ability to think laterally and uniquely has benefited the rural doctor movement enormously and her retirement has allowed me to also slow down and approach my own retirement.



“I look forward to seeing our young Rural Generalist doctors, especially those who have travelled through our Queenstown practice, take ownership of the future of Rural Medicine in Tasmania through their own involvement in working with, encouraging and training their future cohorts.

“It should always be remembered that nothing has been given to rural communities or their health professionals that hasn’t involved a substantial fight on behalf of and by the communities themselves. I urge our future Rural Generalist doctors to be involved, to take the initiative, and to remember that repeating old failed solutions only leads to repetitive failure.

“The Rural Generalist movement is only the first step. Keep the journey going.”

Dr Merfield also announced the recipients of other RDAT Annual Awards for 2022.

RDAT’s Tasmanian Rural Doctor-in-Training 2022 is Dr Ben Dodds, a home-grown Tasmanian doctor and a rising star of Rural Generalist Medicine in Tasmania.

“Ben is a powerhouse of the rural doctors movement in Tasmania, and a strong advocate for Rural Generalist Medicine and rural communities in our state”

Dr Merfield said.

“He combines his significant work and training responsibilities as a Rural Generalist Registrar at Ochre Health in Scottsdale and Bridport with work at the Launceston General Hospital’s Emergency Department and North Eastern Soldiers Memorial Hospital at Scottsdale.

“Ben has served as Secretary and Vice President of RDAT, and was just elected as RDAT’s new President! He is also a Board member of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia. Additionally, he is past President of Rustica (the University of Tasmania’s rural health club) and was named as the Tasmanian Health Service’s Intern of the Year for 2018.

“We are immensely fortunate to have Ben not only working as a doctor in rural Tasmania, but also contributing so significantly to the rural doctors’ movement both in Tasmania and nationally.”

RDAT’s Tasmanian Rural Medical Student of the Year 2022 is Dr Nicholas (Nick) Lee.

“Nick has received this Award for his outstanding engagement and effortless integration into Rural General Practice” **Dr Merfield said.**

“Nick spent five weeks at Ochre Medical Centre Scottsdale as part of his Year 5 Medical Student rotation, and this was a huge success - he hit the ground running and then returned to Scottsdale for a 3 month rotation as a Junior Doctor. He has been highly valued by patients and other members of the clinical team at Scottsdale. He also has a very positive attitude and an extremely generous and helpful nature.

“Nick will be working at Ochre Medical Centre Scottsdale for another two weeks, after which time he will be undertaking a rotation in Plastics and Reconstructive Surgery at the Launceston General Hospital.

“His current plans for the future are to continue working at the Launceston General Hospital and in various specialties to gain clinical exposure and experience. He is presently exploring opportunities to pursue Emergency Medicine/General Practice, and combine this with his interest in Allergy Medicine.

“We greatly look forward to watching Nick’s career progress.”



Find high resolution photos here:

Dr Eve Merfield - www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/595

Professor Dennis Pashen - www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/2133

Dr Ben Dodds - www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/2132

Dr Nicholas Lee - www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/2131

All awardees and Dr Merfield are available for interview.

Media contacts: Patrick Daley (0408 004 890) or Ineke Kuiper (0408 669 638).