

Media release
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Inspiring rural doctors and medical student recognised in annual RDAT awards

An Emergency Physician who has served the North West Tasmania region for more than a decade, a doctor-in-training who is a passionate advocate for First Nations people and her junior doctor colleagues, and a medical student who has recently completed a clinical placement on Flinders Island have been recognised in this year's Rural Doctors Association of Tasmania (RDAT) Awards.

The Award recipients were announced at the official Awards dinner at the Tasmanian Rural Health Conference, held at the weekend in Devonport.

RDAT's Tasmanian Rural Doctor of the Year 2023 is Dr Marielle Ruigrok, who has worked in North West Tasmania as an Emergency Physician since 2009.

During her time there she has been the Clinical Lead for Emergency Medicine across the North-West Regional and Mersey Community Hospitals, and has been a strong supporter of rural GPs and District Hospitals.

"Marielle has progressed implementation of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine's (ACRRM's) Emergency Skills training posts, delivered a blended model of emergency care for the Mersey Community Hospital using both Emergency Specialists and Rural Generalist doctors, and provided excellent training opportunities to GPs working on the West Coast and Far North-west Coast" **RDAT President, Dr Ben Dodds, said.**

"She has been a strong leader of healthcare services in the North West region through the highs and lows of recent years, and has a loyal following of clinicians. As she is returning to the mainland soon for family reasons, we really wanted to recognise all she has done over many years to improve the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians in the North West."

Dr Ruigrok said: "I have been an Emergency Specialist for 23 years and here in the North West for 14 years. I really am passionate about improving the service for rural people."

The RDAT Tasmanian Rural Doctor in Training of the Year 2023 is Dr Montana (Monty) Chugg, a palawa woman who is currently a medical intern at Launceston General Hospital and a Tasmanian Rural Generalist scholarship holder. Monty is passionate about rural healthcare, and will undertake a rotation in General Practice at St Helens later this year.

"Monty is not only a high quality doctor with excellent skills, but also a passionate advocate of the palawa people, and strongly involved in education about First Nations people, their culture and needs" **Dr Dodds said.**

"She is a strong advocate for her junior doctor colleagues and has demonstrated leadership skills even at this early stage of her career. Doctors in Rural General Practice have spoken very highly of her eagerness to learn, her compassion for patients and her awareness of the many issues that impact on healthcare delivery and outcomes in rural and remote Tasmania."

Dr Chugg said: "I grew up knowing the beauty of lutruwita/Tasmania - my parents were both born and raised in remote areas, and they'd take me travelling all around our beautiful state every summer. But at the age of 5,



when my pop passed away from a melanoma he never got checked out, I realised that living rurally could be hard sometimes.

“As I've progressed through Medicine and experienced rural placements, I've found such a passion in helping rural Australians receive the healthcare they need, exactly where they are. My broad interest in all specialties of Medicine and love of a good challenge has also led me towards a career in remote areas, as it offers opportunities to practise a wide range of skills, tackle complex problems and make a real, tangible difference in the lives of my patients.”

The Tasmanian Rural Medical Student of the Year 2023 is Clay Ritchie, a fifth year medical student at the University of Tasmania who recently undertook a clinical placement on Flinders Island and has shown a keen interest in Rural Medicine as his potential career path.

“Clay has engaged in his General Practice placements with enthusiasm, and has received excellent reports from his supervisors over the past two years” **Dr Dodds said.**

“He found his Rural General Practice placement on Flinders Island to be fantastic and said it definitely bumped this area of Medicine into his field of view as a potential future career direction.



“It is important to note that not all medical students will accept a placement in such a remote setting - Clay not only accepted the placement but went to the next level and engaged completely in the experience.

“Clay’s fiancée is training as a firefighter so he will ultimately aim to be where she is located, but he hopes to obtain an intern position in Launceston or Burnie once he graduates from his medical degree.”

Clay said: “I’m very honoured to be receiving this award and I’m thankful for the recognition of my efforts by RDAT. I understand the importance of rural health in Tasmania and look forward to seeing how I can contribute to healthcare in the future.”

Dr Dodds said: “We warmly congratulate Marielle, Monty and Clay on this highly deserved recognition, and thank each of them for their dedication and commitment to rural and remote healthcare in Tasmania.”

Download high resolution photos here:

[Dr Ben Dodds](#)

[Dr Marielle Ruijgrok](#)

[Dr Montana \(Monty\) Chugg](#)

[Clay Ritchie](#)

The Award winners and Dr Dodds are available for interview.

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