

19 June 2024

## Tasmania's best rural doctors recognised in annual awards

### RDAT Tasmanian Rural Health Awards

Outstanding care for rural patients, rural communities and rural medicine was recognised with the presentation of the Tasmanian Rural Health Awards.

Three prestigious awards for the Tasmanian Rural Doctor, Doctor in Training and Medical Student of the Year were presented, with the recipients representing the best of the best in Tasmanian rural health.

The annual awards are presented by the Rural Doctors Association of Tasmania (RDAT) during the Tasmanian Rural Health Conference, with RDAT President, Dr Ben Dodds, saying it was a highlight of the conference to recognise the three outstanding award winners.

"We have so many great and dedicated rural health professionals in Tasmania, and the nominee field for the awards was excellent," Dr Ben Dodds said.

"While it was difficult to select just one winner for each category, we were so pleased to be able to recognise Dr Colin Smith from Queenstown as our Rural Doctor of the Year, Dr Gary Wood from St Helens as our Rural Doctor in Training of the Year, and Gabrielle Dewsbury as our Rural Medical Student of the Year.



#### **Tasmanian Rural Doctor of the Year 2024 – Dr Colin Smith**

"It was a privilege to present the Tasmanian Rural Doctor of the Year 2024 in memory of Prof Dennis Pashen," Dr Dodds said. "Dennis was a Life Member of RDAT and his leadership, friendship and dedication to rural health was legendary, so it was very fitting to present this award to Dr Colin Smith of Ochre Medical Centre Queenstown, which is where Dennis worked for the final years of his clinical career.

"Colin's dedication and passion for rural healthcare and education have been transformative. He joined Ochre Queenstown as a locum supervisor, addressing critical staffing challenges and helping restore the practice's accreditation and teaching status.

"He has been pivotal in securing additional registrars, regaining accreditation, hosting interns and his efforts have also allowed the practice to resume hosting UTAS medical students for rural placements.

"Colin supports both the practice and the district hospital, improving systems, handover processes, and contributing to GP service.

“His commitment extends beyond patient care; he mentors junior doctors, advocates for healthcare improvements, and often puts the needs of the practice and patients above his own. Colin is a staunch advocate for the West Coast and rural healthcare, going above and beyond the call of duty. The community is incredibly grateful to have him, and the future of rural healthcare on the West Coast of Tasmania looks bright with Colin leading the charge.

“It is a privilege to recognise his great work and dedication by awarding him the Tasmanian Rural Doctor of the Year 2024.”

### **RDAT Rural Doctor in Training of the Year 2024 – Dr Gary Wood**

“Dr Gary Wood joined the Ochre team in St Helens last year after relocating from Queensland with his husband Nate and their dogs,” Dr Dodds said.

“A First Nations man who identifies as LGBTQI, Gary has become an integral part of the community, offering exceptional medical care and unwavering commitment. His broad expertise spans women's health, emergency care, inpatient and palliative care, cosmetic procedures, and specialised care for gender-diverse and neurodiverse patients. Beyond his clinical excellence, he leads North East Pride meetings, providing a supportive space for the local LGBTQI+ community.

“Gary's dedication to addressing rural healthcare challenges is commendable. He implements innovative solutions for smoother practice and emergency department operations and is always willing to mentor and support his colleagues. He is well respected by nursing staff and allied health, is inclusive of all team members and takes their opinions seriously, while fostering a collegial and relaxed atmosphere.

“For his dedication, compassion, and profound community impact, it was my pleasure to award Gary the RDAT Rural Doctor in Training Award 2024.”



### **RDAT Rural Medical Student of the Year 2024 – Gabrielle Dewsbury**

“It was a great pleasure to award the RDAT Rural Medical Student of the Year 2024 to Gabrielle Dewsbury,” Dr Dodds said.

“Gabby is a fourth year medical student at the University of Tasmania’s (UTAS’s) Rural Clinical School, where she has demonstrated exceptional leadership. She is currently Vice President of the Australian Medical Students’ Association (AMSA) advocating for students who are interested in general practice and rural career pathways.

“She participated in UTAS’s Early Years Pilot Program, enabling her to undertake the first and second years of her medical degree in Launceston, and she is now a strong advocate for being able to study locally. In her spare time she is a Volunteer Ambulance Officer with Ambulance Tasmania and a mentor at Edmund Rice Camps Tasmania.

“We are privileged to have such a dedicated and enthusiastic medical student keen to pursue a rural medical career, and it is wonderful to be able to recognise her as RDAT’s Rural Medical Student of the Year 2024.”

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[Click here for a high resolution photo of Dr Ben Dodds](#)

**Award recipient photos:**

[Dr Colin Smith](#)

[Dr Gary Wood with Dr Aaron Hawkins, RDAT Secretary](#)

[Gabrielle Dewsbury with Dr Ben Dodds, RDAT President](#)

**Available for interview:**

Dr Ben Dodds, RDAT President  
Award recipients available on request

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