

RURAL DOCTORS ASSOCIATION (NSW) INC

'Caring for the Country'

Media Release — Friday 15 May 2009

Surgeon to provide free surgical service at Bourke during 6 month trial

The Rural Doctors Association of NSW (RDA NSW) has welcomed a decision by the Greater Western Area Health Service (GWAHS) to allow Bathurst-based surgeon, Dr Neil Meulman, to provide a free fly-in-fly-out surgical service at Bourke Hospital under a six month trial.

Since June 2007, Dr Meulman has been offering to commence the much-needed service at the new hospital in Bourke. Following ongoing advocacy by Dr Meulman and RDA NSW on the need for such a service, GWAHS recently agreed to a six month trial of surgical services at the hospital.

Under the trial, Dr Meulman will undertake one day of general surgery per month at the hospital.

"This is great news for the people of Bourke and surrounding districts, and we commend the GWAHS and NSW Government for allowing the trial to proceed," RDA NSW immediate past President Dr Les Woollard said.

"We would also like to publicly acknowledge the generosity of Dr Meulman in volunteering his time to provide this important service to the people of Bourke. It should be remembered that he is not only waiving his usual surgical fees, but he is also covering his own travel and other costs in getting to Bourke.

"One of the key recommendations of the Garling report into NSW public hospitals was that more surgery should be undertaken at small hospitals in the State.

"This makes a lot of sense, particularly when you consider that the NSW Government has committed significant funding to build the new hospital at Bourke—a hospital that has a new operating theatre, a local GP anaesthetist, qualified nursing staff and all necessary equipment to provide surgical services.

"Additionally, providing these services locally means that patients from Bourke and surrounding areas will now not need to travel hundreds of kilometres for surgery that could easily be undertaken in Bourke itself. This will save them time and money while also relieving pressure on other hospitals that have hitherto been required to accept patients from Bourke for surgery.

"We look forward to watching the success of this trial and hope that it will convince the GWAHS and NSW Government that general surgery at Bourke Hospital should become a permanent service in the future."

**Dr Les Woollard is available for interview on tel: 0438 522 773
Dr Neil Meulman is available for interview on tel: 0417 688 782.**