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Collaboration the key to addressing rural health workforce challenges

The call for a nationally focussed, multidisciplinary approach to training rural health professionals is a sensible way to address the longer term health needs of rural communities, says the New Zealand Rural General Practice Network.

The Network supports a call by Professor Max Abbott, Dean of the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences at Auckland University of Technology to train not only doctors but also nurses and allied health professionals specifically for rural communities, many of which struggle to recruit and retain health professionals, said Network Chief Executive Dalton Kelly.

“Professor Abbott’s assertion that we don’t need more of the same, we need to do things differently and better, goes right to the heart of the matter.

“If doctors, nurses, pharmacy and midwives, for example, are training together in a rural health setting, they are going to be far better prepared to work and live in a rural community,” says Mr Kelly.

“Rural New Zealand’s workforce training, recruitment and retention challenges are well documented. We now also have the added challenge of a rapidly ageing workforce with 40 per cent of GPs set to retire nationwide in the next five to 10 years.

“We know that replacing every retiring GP in rural NZ is probably not achievable, so it’s important that we promote rural health careers for other health professions such as Nurse Practitioners, Rural Nurse Specialists, Pharmacists and others who make up the integrated rural healthcare team,” says Mr Kelly.

“To have our leading universities collaborate to train these medical and health professionals to work and live in rural communities is a pragmatic approach.”

A collaborative and focussed training pathway is also more likely to gain Government support, added Mr Kelly.

For more comment contact NZRGPN Chief Executive Dalton Kelly on 027 231 0067.