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New Rural General Practice Chair welcomes health hubs, calls for National Rural Health Commissioner

Newly-elected Chair of the New Zealand Rural General Practice Network, Dr Fiona Bolden, ended the organisation's annual conference by welcoming government commitment to creating rural health training hubs under a national framework and suggesting a new position of National Rural Health Commissioner to oversee the development of this.

Fiona Bolden is a GP who has most recently practiced for 17 years in Raglan and now provides locum support to New Zealand's rural general practices. She said it was an exciting time to be elected to chair the NZRGPN, which represents almost every rural practice in New Zealand.

"We've ended this conference [April 7] with a real sense of hope that we can start to reverse the steady decline of rural health practitioners through starting to train a range of medical professionals inside our rural communities.

"We're delighted with the Minister of Health's commitment, announced at this conference, to creating a network of decentralised, multidisciplinary health training hubs in our regions.

"While there is a lot of detail to work through now, the NZRGPN sees this as the opportunity the sector has been looking for. We're committed to playing a leadership role in working with the sector - in particular those already involved in education, the government and the Ministry of Health as well as rural communities and iwi in helping design and implement the first of these hubs as quickly as possible under a supportive national framework.

"It will be critically important for all stakeholders in the rural health sector to put aside any self-interest and work cooperatively together to ensure a national framework to support a network of rural health hubs which can be quickly implemented and start to serve our rural communities."

Dr Bolden said it had been a privilege to have the Australian National Rural Health Commissioner, Professor Paul Worley, in New Zealand for this year's conference and she saw real potential for a similar role to be created in New Zealand.

"Professor Worley has been widely credited with overhauling Australia's rural health system, including through the establishment of a network of rural training hubs as favoured by the rural health sector and the government.

"We are keen to explore with government the opportunity of creating a similar position in New Zealand to coordinate a wide range of stakeholders and provide the common point of leadership to drive the much-needed implementation of a network of rural health training hubs under national leadership with thorough academic input from all disciplines involved," she said.

"For the first time in a number of years there is a genuine sense of hope that the rural health sector's concerns and aspirations are shared by decision makers and there is now a joint commitment as to how to begin to rebuild a sustainable and world-class rural health system."

[For more information contact NZRGPN Chief Executive, Dalton Kelly, on 027 231 0067](#)