Lifetime of service recognised for South Australian rural GP and Air Force Doctor

Dr David Senior of Robe in South Australia has had his lifetime of service to Australia and his community acknowledged by his peers, receiving the ACRRM-RDAA Peter Graham ‘Cohuna’ Award for 2016.

The Peter Graham ‘Cohuna’ Award is the highest honour that can be bestowed by the rural doctor community, and is awarded jointly by the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) in recognition of service of the highest order over many decades.

Starting his career as a junior doctor in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), Dr Senior has contributed to research protecting pilots from G-Force pressures, and worked tirelessly as a GP in rural South Australia and on behalf of the Rural Doctors Association of South Australia (RDASA), as well as the Rural Doctors Workforce Agency (RDWA).

The award was presented at a Gala dinner during the joint annual conference of ACRRM and RDAA, Rural Medicine Australia 2016 (RMA16).

Associate Professor Ruth Stewart, ACRRM President, said it was an honour to be able to recognise Dr Senior’s lifetime of commitment.

“David started his career in the RAAF, looking after RAAF families both in Australia and overseas before being posted to the United States as the RAAF exchange medical officer where he was Chief of Flight Medicine at Headquarters Tactical Air Command” she said.

“During this time he was involved in research to help understand and prevent F-16 pilots from blacking out due to high G-force pressures during manoeuvres. He presented to a USA four-star general in order to progress the aircraft feedback solutions he had envisaged.

“On returning to Australia he was responsible for the professional control of all the RAAF medical facilities on operational bases in Australia and overseas.

“David later worked as a Director for the Surgeon General in Canberra, however he missed seeing patients, so he, along with his wife Christine, made the decision to take over his father’s GP practice in Robe, South Australia, in 1993.

“For many years David has provided rural generalist services for the communities of Robe, Lucindale, Kingston and more recently Beachport, and for the last few years has also provided Director of Medical Services support part-time at Edenhope Hospital. Often he has managed this 24/7 care at Robe and Lucindale single-handedly.

“He was an early adopter and supporter of Phil Tideman’s cardiac network which has evolved to provide South Australian rural doctors with constant access to specialist cardiologists for the management of acute cardiac events and has considerably improved health outcomes for rural South Australians.

“He has also been part of the Rural Emergency Responder Network in the upper Limestone Coast for the past few years.”
Dr Senior transferred his strategic thinking skills from the Air Force to supporting, developing and sustaining local hospital and health services on the Limestone Coast, and has contributed to governance of the local hospital board and the local Division of General Practice over many years. He has also Chaired the South East Clinical Senate in the early 2000s.

Dr Ewen McPhee, RDAA President, said that Dr Senior has made a huge contribution to the rural medical profession, and has been a champion for high quality care, particularly for South Australians.

“David has provided many years of service on the Board and as President of the Rural Doctors Association of South Australia (RDASA)” he said.

“From 2008 to 2014, he provided strong industrial support through his role with RDASA and was a very strong advocate for rural hospitals when the-then State Health Minister John Hill’s Country Health Plan would have closed 43 of them.

“David has been a longstanding Board-member of the Rural Doctors Workforce Agency (RDWA), which provides significant locum relief and other supports for the recruitment and retention of rural doctors in South Australia.

“With this award we recognise his long-term commitment to the communities of Robe and Lucindale in South Australia, which he still services today, and his more recent contribution to Edenhope in Victoria.

“The award also recognises his service to RAAF personnel and their families throughout his 22 years of service, and his political and advocacy work.

“I congratulate David on his amazing career, and feel privileged to be able to call him a rural medical colleague.”

Dr Senior said he was amazed that he had been awarded the honour and it was a complete surprise.

“I was absolutely gobsmacked when my name was announced” he said.

“I have always just been doing my best to improve the health of my patients and my community.

“Over all my years of medical practice, I’m most proud of the contribution I’ve made to public health and the health of my community overall, and it’s an amazing feeling to have been able to make a difference to the lives of so many in the Robe district.

“Of course, I couldn’t have worked the way I have without the support of my wife Christine, who works as a physiotherapist, as part-time receptionist in my practice, and most importantly as my partner in life since we were university sweethearts.

“It still amazes me to have been recognised for just doing my job which I love so much.”

A high resolution photograph of Dr David Senior is available by contacting Patrick Daley.

Dr David Senior is available for interview.

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