

REMOTE AND RURAL CONFERENCE HELD IN REMOTE AND RURAL LOCATION!

Student led conference in Islay provides novel long-term solution to rural GP recruitment

By Keenan Smith, Gregor Stark and Alistair Carr

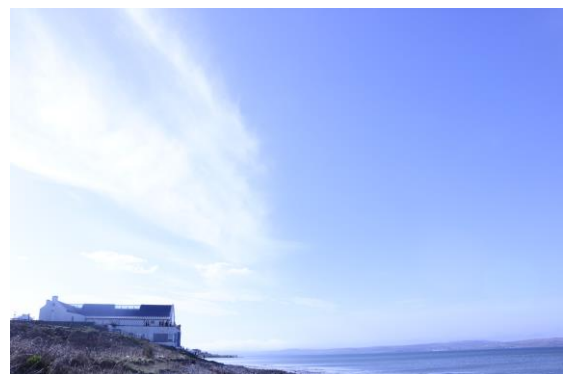


Six months ago, we were sitting in the Glasgow University Union listening to Alistair explain his plan. He'd just returned from a five week GP placement on Islay where his eyes had been opened to the challenges and excitement that lay in rural general practice. Despite the recruitment crisis facing general practice everywhere, and rural general practice in particular, he was convinced that if other students could experience what he had, it would inspire them too.

That evening, the five of us formed the Glasgow University Remote and Rural Medicine Society (GURRMS). Our founding goal was to host a conference with a real and lasting impact. With a message that no delegate could ignore: rural GP provides an exciting and dynamic career that should not be written off as a sleepy backwater of a career.

We wanted to create something that would change not just how 60 medical students thought, but that would become a staple of the undergraduate social and educational calendar - changing perceptions for years to come.

If we were going to make that much of a difference, we were going to have to think big. We knew this had to show off everything that rural practice had to offer and that this meant going to Islay.



The Gaelic College in Bowmore was the conference venue

To say we didn't have doubts would be a lie, we had thousands, but the largest was the central premise of the entire project: if we offered this to students, would they even want to come? A close second to this was: how would we find the funding for a conference involving the immense logistical challenges of providing transport, accommodation, and catering in an island with a permanent population of 3,500.

Despite our reservations our 60 delegate tickets sold out within four and a half hours – clearly demonstrating the demand among medical students for more exposure to rural practice. Following this, we were successful in securing sponsorship from organisations that were able to appreciate the vision and scope of what we were trying to achieve.

When Friday 10th of March came around, every seat in the Gaelic College was filled with eager students. Most were from Scotland but some had come from as far away as Plymouth, Oxford and Hull.



Dr Angus MacTaggart explaining the joys of being a rural GP

A spectacular view across Loch Indaal was the backdrop to the inaugural National Undergraduate Remote and Rural Medicine Conference. The morning session started with a talk by Dr Angus

McTaggart defining what rural medicine is and the rewards it can offer. This was followed by the EMRS team talking about their role and how they interact with rural GPs.



EMRS Drs Michael Carachi and Kevin Thomson

Following a short break Dr Kate Pickering talked about the importance of medical leadership, after which a workshop took place. This gave the opportunity for two of Islay's retired GPs, Drs Chris Abell and Sandy Taylor, to engage the students in a discussion about the benefits and challenges of working in a rural environment. Simultaneously to this another workshop took place, led by the Rural GP Fellows Drs Jess Cooper and Durga Sivasathiaseelan, leading a discussion about how to act in a rural emergency and also providing information about the Rural GP Fellowship programme.



Rural GP Fellow led workshop: managing emergencies in rural communities – the things no one else will think to tell you!

During lunch the students chatted with patients who had volunteered to come in to speak about their experiences of rural healthcare and also to give a flavour of island life. Following lunch, Mr Stuart Fergusson kicked off with a talk about rural surgery in Scotland, after which Professor John Kinsella, Chair of SIGN Guidelines, gave a talk about the limitations of guidelines in a rural setting where he made the interesting comparison of rural medicine to the ICU environment.



Students talking about their experiences of rural placements

After another break, with more excellent catering by the Gaelic College team, the EMRS guys provided a brief overview of the realities of pre-hospital care which was then followed by five student presentations. These provided a showcase of the projects that students have undertaken whilst on rural placements or undertaken during intercalated degrees. The educational content of the day finished with a panel discussion about what Realistic Medicine is and how that applies in the rural context.

The Saturday was used to explore rural life and further experience the community we were being invited to be a part of. Some of the students explored the beautiful scenery by going for a hill walk and some

participated in a joint RNLI and coastguard training exercise which involved three of the students being winched out of the sea. For the students that had caught wind of Islay's whisky reputation, a tour of the Bruichladdich distillery was arranged where they were treated to some proper Islay hospitality.



Students participating in the Saturday hill walk

The informal feedback we have got thus far has been overwhelmingly positive: certainly more than one rural elective is being sought after last weekend. A recurring theme has been how impressed students were by the strength of the island's community and the generosity of the locals. Formal feedback is in the process of being collected and will be made available in due course.

The 2017-18 GURRMS committee has now been elected and have exciting plans for the future. Watch this space!



GURRMS 2017-18 committee – what does the future hold?

GURRMS would like to thank all our speakers: Dr Angus MacTaggart; Dr Michael Carachi and Dr Kevin Thomson; Mr Stuart Ferguson; Dr Kate Pickering; Dr Jess Cooper and Dr Durga Sivasathiaseelan; Dr Chris Abell and Dr Sandy Taylor; Professor John Kinsella; Cameron Kay; Beth Dorrans; Josie Bellhouse; James McHugh; Eloise Miller and Hannah Greenlees. Also our sponsors: the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow; the Rural General Practitioner Association of Scotland; the Faculty of Pre-Hospital Care of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh; the University of Glasgow; NHS Highland and Bruichladdich distillery. And finally a huge thanks to all of the medical team of Islay for your support and for believing in us.

GURRMS



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