

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

THURSDAY 15TH OF NOVEMBER 2012

RURAL DOCTOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:13): I rise today to congratulate two doctors from the electorate of Hammond who have been recognised for their outstanding commitment to rural health and longstanding community service by being jointly awarded the Telstra Rural Doctors Association of Australia Rural Doctor of the Year Award 2012.

Doctors Martin and Fiona Altman from Murray Bridge received the national award at the Rural Medicine Australia 2012 celebrations held in Western Australia on 27 October. For the past 20 years, Martin and Fiona have both worked in Murray Bridge providing obstetric, anaesthetic, surgical and intensive care services to the local hospital and clinics, and have been praised for their enthusiasm for the education of interns, registrars and medical students.

Martin and Fiona are committed family GPs to Murray Bridge and its outlying communities, whilst also raising four children. This award is well deserved and is a true credit to the amount of work Martin and Fiona do. Martin and Fiona were nominated by their peers and, although proud to have won the award, they are both very humble and believe this is an award for the Murray Bridge clinic and hospital.

Martin has been a key provider of obstetric services to the region and has instigated the advanced obstetric training position for GP registrars at Murray Bridge, where he teaches young doctors how to perform caesarean sections. Murray Bridge was the first small country town in Australia to receive the accreditation to allow such training, and Martin says that he and other local doctors fought hard for this and that he is extremely proud for the hospital to receive such accreditation.

Along with Dr Suzanne Seals, who in her own right has a terrific story as a South African doctor who moved to the town and immersed her family in the community, Martin drives the Nungas Aboriginal health outreach clinic for Murray Bridge's Ngarrindjeri community.

Fiona has contributed expertise in anaesthetics and intensive care and is heavily involved in the medical training of interns and registrars. She has a strong commitment to women's health services and also provides a valued acupuncture service. Fiona's efforts and knowledge in emergency medicine are a great asset to Murray Bridge. I have met Fiona a number of times, and she is a lovely woman who would go out of her way to do anything for anyone. I would like to read you a quote from Fiona when accepting the award:

We feel privileged to be able to live here in Murray Bridge and work with such an amazing team of doctors and nursing staff at both the practice and the hospital, and are honoured to be a part of such a wonderful community.

Murray Bridge is Martin's home town, having grown up there, and his father was also a very well-respected rural GP in the town and himself heavily involved in medical education and one of the first lecturers in rural general practice at the University of Adelaide.

Without doctors such as Martin and Fiona, and the support of the wonderful team in Murray Bridge, the state of health in our regions and rural communities would be worrying. This brings me to a number of concerns I have with the state government plans, which are causing uncertainty, anxiety and angst amongst many of our country doctors, in particular those in the Hammond electorate, in Murray Bridge, Karoonda, which is surviving on a locum service at the minute, and Tailem Bend.

News that the Murray Bridge clinic has had its emergency on-call allowance cut under the new on-call conditions imposed by Country Health SA is extremely disappointing. The on-call allowance funding cut will have a serious domino effect:

- 1.It will stop the support provided to these doctors in towns, from Murray Bridge doctors, putting more unnecessary pressure on health services in country areas.
- 2.It will make recruiting young South Australian doctors to regional communities tougher than it already is.
- 3.It will see doctors, such as those in Karoonda and Tailem Bend, look for relocation to areas that are supported, which will devastate towns which rely on their local doctor.

Celebrations of awards like the RDAA Rural Doctor of the Year Award, awarded to Dr Martin and Dr Fiona Altmann, only provide a minute insight into the amount of work our doctors, nurses and medical staff do in country areas.

Fiona and Martin and the team at Bridge Clinic provide a fantastic rural service that saves a lot of people having to come to Adelaide for treatment and, as mentioned, the state of health in our regions would be worrying without such support. I call on the government to review its policy in regard to country health and its on-call allowance situation and to reinstate its emergency on-call allowance in order to save our country hospitals.

I further congratulate Fiona and Martin and acknowledge that he is my father's doctor and that Martin's father was also our family doctor for a while. I congratulate

them both, and I congratulate the team at Bridge Clinic and the Murray Bridge health service generally.