

# Research on how to retain country doctors

DOCTORS working in rural towns are more likely to leave regional community practices, according to new Australian research, prompting a need for better government policy that influences them to stay.

Research in the *Medical Journal of Australia* found higher rates of general practitioner mobility in towns with populations fewer than 5000 people or towns with up to 15,000 people.

University of Tasmania Rural Clinical School co-director associate professor Lizzi Shires said the recruitment and retention of doctors in small rural Tasmania towns had been an ongoing issue, with a number of strategies already in

place.

She said one of the long-term strategies was about recruiting students from regional and rural areas into the health profession.

"They come from that rural background and are more likely to stay.

"In the meantime, we need to look at other things we can be doing in those communities to support the doctors who move in. What can we be doing to help them put down their roots and influence them to stay?"

Wynyard GP Gin Berryman, who operates the Saunders Street Clinic, said it was important for rural doctors to connect and become a part of the community, and also for

their spouses to be able to find work.

He said rural GPs must also be prepared for a high incidence of on-call demands, emergency work and the ability to offer bulk-billed discounts.

"You have to like living in a rural community and also the variety of work.

"It can be quite stressful and some GPs would prefer to work in larger towns and cities when they are not on call or can specialise ... I have found the work really stimulating."

The report's authors wrote that further research would investigate any links between GP satisfaction with schools in regional communities and their mobility.