

**Media Release
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Australia's cancer care leaders to focus on rural and remote issues at 9th Conference

Improving the comparatively poor cancer care outcomes experienced by patients in rural and remote Australia will be a key focus of the 9th National Rural Health Conference, to be held in Albury, 7-10 March 2007.

The National Rural Health Alliance, which hosts the conference every two years, has invited the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia (COSA), the peak body for multidisciplinary cancer care professionals, to participate at the event in response to evidence showing cancer patients in rural and remote areas have higher mortality rates than their urban counterparts and significantly reduced access to services.

“A report published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* in 2004 showed that people with cancer in regional NSW were 35% more likely to die within five years of diagnosis than patients in cities,” Craig Underhill, Chair of COSA’s Rural Oncology Group, said. “Mortality rates increase with remoteness. For some cancers, remote patients are up to 300% more likely to die within five years of diagnosis.”

Dr Underhill, a medical oncologist based in Albury, is a lead author of a 2006 COSA study that shows access to cancer care services also decreases markedly with remoteness. He will be discussing the study’s findings at the conference.

The sessions will also feature the heads of Australia’s leading cancer control organisations from the clinical, community and government sectors, including David Goldstein (COSA), Ian Olver (The Cancer Council Australia), David Currow (Cancer Australia), Helen Zorbas (the National Breast Cancer Centre), Jim Bishop (the Cancer Institute NSW) and Chris Brook (Victorian Government).

Leading epidemiologists Bruce Armstrong (rural disadvantage in cancer care) and David Roder (cancer in remote Aboriginal communities) will also present, along with experts from a range of allied health disciplines.

“The burden of cancer in Australia is increasing significantly as our population ages and as we make greater advances in controlling cardiovascular disease,” Dr Underhill said. “Evidence shows that people in rural and remote areas will experience a disproportionate amount of this burden. The conference will provide a good opportunity for everyone with a stake in rural healthcare to contribute to understand the challenges of cancer care in rural and remote Australia and contribute to solutions.”

Information on the conference’s cancer streams:

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To register: <http://9thnrhc.ruralhealth.org.au/registration/?IntCatId=2>

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