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Health for All People
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A POSITIVE APPROACH TO RURAL PRACTICE

This edition of the Journal includes the main proceedings of the scientific programme of the second World Rural Health Congress, which was held in Durban from 14th to 17th September 1997. In drawing this edition together, the needs of two different groups of readers were kept constantly in mind: those who attended the Congress, for whom this publication will form the first part of the official Congress proceedings, and other members of the South African Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care, of which this is the official journal.

For those who attended the Congress at the new International Convention Centre in Durban, these articles will be read in the context of memories of the collective enthusiasm generated by more than 350 rural practitioners from around the world. This was a congress of rural practitioners, by rural practitioners, for rural practitioners. For some, it was the first time that they had encountered the sense of identity as a rural practitioner, while for others, it was a celebration of another success in putting rural health issues on the political agenda in this and many other countries.

The verbal and visible support of the South African Minister of Health, Dr Zuma, was salutary (*ex 'salus': 'conducive to health, well-being'*). Her challenge to produce feasible recommendations for implementation was taken up enthusiastically by the delegate body, and the Durban Declaration and Congress Recommendations published in these proceedings are the concrete result of that process.

With regard to the family practice fraternity in general, and specifically those who were not at the Congress, the emergence of the rural movement presents an opportunity to enhance the vision and practice of generalist medicine. The issues of access and equity are universal problems, and they are particularly well illustrated in the rural context. Rural practice can indeed be taken as a model of "best practice", when the apparent disadvantages of distance from referral centres and the absence of specialists are taken instead as opportunities for local development and the rational use of resources.

None illustrated this positive approach in the face of extreme adversity more than Dr Jo Lusi, whose keynote address on the final day was singularly inspiring. It is this spirit of dedication and humility, combined with a vision and ability to make the best out of the existing situation, that captured the essence of what rural practitioners have to offer the rest of the profession.

Future issues of this journal will carry the remaining reports of the clinical sessions of the Congress, and the information technology programme. As guest editor, I look forward to feedback on the issues raised by the proceedings, and the further development of rural practice in this country and around the world.

Dr Steve Reid, Guest Editor

EDITOR'S NOTE: All papers included in this issue have been abridged and edited from the second World Rural Health Congress. It is hoped that further papers from the Congress will be included in later issues.

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