

FLEXIBLE PRACTICE IN RURAL AUSTRALIA: EXISTING MODELS FOR REDUCING WORKLOAD AND INCREASING FAMILY TIME

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Between 2001 - 2003 the National Rural Faculty of the RACGP conducted a Rural Family Support Project to identify and pilot responses to the family support needs of rural GPs. By doing so, the project aimed to gain evidence about the importance of family support needs in terms of retention of rural GPs and evidence about how these needs might best be addressed. This paper addresses one set of responses to the need identified by a number of participants: the need for more flexible arrangements so that rural GPs can increase family time and decrease workload. The term "flexible practice" describes a way of accommodating the needs of GPs to spend time with family or on activities outside their time at work. Whilst issues of high workload are paramount, flexible practice (also termed "sustainable practice") also relates to quality of life, ability to take leave at short notice, the option to work part-time, ways of dispersing on-call duties between different practitioners and health services, easy entry and graceful exit from practices. Traditionally, GPs have relied on locum relief to achieve these aims (which has not been adequate to meet needs), and other models have not been widely understood by rural GPs. This paper was developed as an aid to rural general practitioners and takes the form of a literature review of current models that respond to the need for flexible practice arrangements. The paper aims to stimulate discussion about ways to increase flexible practice in rural areas.