

OBITUARY

Farewell Ralph McLean – a quiet contributor to rural health

R Strasser¹, D Wyatt²

¹Northern Ontario School of Medicine, Sudbury, Ontario, Canada

²Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

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Strasser R, Wyatt D

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On 25 December 2010, the rural health community lost a strong ally with the passing of Ralph McLean. Ralph, who was born in the Victorian country town of Kilmore, had a long and distinguished career in public service, including a term as the Mayor of the Melbourne municipality of Fitzroy and as Executive Director of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations. He was very active in the performing arts community in Melbourne.

Ralph's contribution to rural health began in the early 1990s and included a period as Acting Executive Director of the Victorian Rural Divisions Coordinating Unit (VRDCU). However, it was during his time with the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) that Ralph helped shape rural health services and rural health workforce policy by creating an environment in which rural health was supported and could grow. For many years Ralph served as Assistant Director, Rural Health and was a major player in reviewing and updating the Australian National Rural Health

Strategy, as well as in developing and implementing rural health policy in Victoria.

When the city of Melbourne won the bid to host the 5th Wonca World Rural Health Conference, Ralph took the lead in ensuring government support. Many of us fondly recall that conference in 2002 when the rural health world came to Australia.

Possibly Ralph's most enduring contribution to rural health was this journal, *Rural and Remote Health*. Ralph had the idea that the internet and the World Wide Web provided an opportunity to connect people with an interest in rural health through an online journal. Initially, he provided DHS seeding funds to Deakin University, Victoria, which at the time was establishing the Greater Green Triangle University Department of Rural Health in partnership with Flinders University, South Australia. Today, this international e-journal, *Rural and Remote Health*, is recognised as the leading journal in its field.