

Gae Swain appointed as first non-GP Board Director for the Barwon Division

Former Gunnedah Mayor Gae Swain is excited about being the first non-GP Director of the Barwon Division of General Practice Board, although she admits feeling a little overwhelmed.

"I am very conscious of the honour", she said, "And I intend to live up to the responsibilities of the position by representing the community to the best of my ability".

The Barwon Division of General Practice is an organisation which supports General Practitioners in the region through programs of illness prevention, education, resource distribution, workforce support and through the funding of allied health professionals.

The Division began was established in 1993 and until now has been governed by a Board of Directors made up exclusively of GPs.

Mrs Swain has had many dealings with the Barwon Division in her previous capacity working for the Gunnedah Shire Council. She said she has been impressed with a number of Division initiatives which address the chronic shortages in the rural health workforce.

"One such program involved the provision of a dental hygienist in one of the aged care facilities in Gunnedah last year. I know that program made a huge difference to the quality of life of many of the residents", Mrs Swain said.

In her former role as Mayor and as an active member of the Gunnedah community, Gae has been made keenly aware of the gaps that exist in health care service delivery for our rural communities.

"I don't think people understand the pressure our rural GPs face in this current climate. There is a perception that GPs have always been there, doing a great job, and will continue on forever", she said.

"People often don't realise how important it is to provide support structures for the GP in order for their services to be sustainable".

Mrs Swain said she hoped she would bring a unique perspective to the Barwon Division Board room table as a health consumer and advocate for the community.

"I think one of the major challenges for the Division is advocating the vitally important role of rural GPs to the decision makers and helping rural communities be pro-active in demanding the health care services they deserve from governments", she said.

Barwon Division of General Practice Chair, Gunnedah GP Dr Grahame Deane, said Gae Swain's appointment enhances the depth of experience on the BDGP Board.

"It has been refreshing to have someone outside the medical profession who is so passionate about improving rural health contribute to our Board discussions. I look forward working closely with Gae in the future", Dr Deane said.

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