

rural medical family network

RMFN
victoria

GUIDE

information booklet
for the rural doctor's spouse

January 2006

introduction

Introduction

Whenever medical families make a change in lifestyle or place of living there are many questions that need to be answered. Many of the questions will be the same whether they are moving to a provincial town or an isolated rural town.

One of the aims of this booklet is to try to answer some of these questions. Another is to make you aware that the Rural Medical Family Network exists and can help you adjust to your new lifestyle in the country.

The Rural Medical Family Network was formed as a result of the obvious needs and gains for sharing information and experience. We are a group of men and women who because of our spouses' occupation have a common bond and interest. We found that a lot of us were experiencing the same problems and the same benefits due to our country lifestyle. The sharing of our thoughts, ideas and solutions at conferences and workshops seemed to benefit all of us.

The original concept for this booklet was developed by the Queensland branch of the Rural Medical Network and the Victorian Branch acknowledges their initiative and their permission to rework the same idea for Victoria.

The RMFN is a volunteer organisation and would like to hear from anyone interested in becoming an active Committee member or a regional representative in your area.

background

Background to the RMFN

The Victorian Rural Medical Family Network was formed in September 1994 at the Rural Doctors' Association of Victoria's Conference held in Tawonga.

As you may be aware, recruiting and retaining GPs in rural Victoria is not an easy task. Now there is at least public and government recognition that partners play a fundamental role in the decision of whether GPs will go and stay in country and remote areas.

In acknowledgement of this, the Federal Government has provided funding to develop the Network which is now represented in every state and is represented nationally by the National RMFN. The Network in Victoria is funded through the Rural Workforce Agency, Victoria Limited.

objectives

RMFN Objectives

Mission:

- Facilitate supportive relationships.
- Promote a positive rural community framework.
- Enable people to appreciate their rural environments.
- Encourage community involvement.

RMFN focuses its support in a number of ways:

- Provide information to GP families who are relocating to rural communities.
- Foster informal networks between doctor's spouses.
- Organise and develop relevant spouse programs at major rural medicine events (eg RDAV Annual Conference, and RWAV Annual Rural GP Conference).
- Build a data base of home addresses and contact numbers of rural spouses.
- Provide information through newsletters and email.
- Website: www.rmfn-vic.com
- Career Counselling Service
- Telephone Crisis Counselling line
- Spouse/Partner Education & Training Grants.

a-z of rural medical life

The A-Z of rural medical life

Accountants

Their importance cannot be overestimated. Having chosen your accountant consider where they are located and how easy it will be to keep in contact with them.



Accommodation for Locums

Sometimes in your house. For those of you who will have locums using your house, please remember that most locums are like your spouse. That is they are “house trained.” This system can work well if the locum is happy to water pot plants and care for your pets. See **Locums**.

Acronyms

Find below a list of acronyms to help you through the acronym heavy world of medicine.

AAGP Australian Association of General Practitioners

ACRRM Australian College of Rural & Remote Medicine

ADGP Australian Divisions of General Practice

AMA Australian Medical Association

AMSA Australian Medical Student Association

ARRWAG Australian Rural and Remote Workforce Agencies Group

CPD Continuing Professional Development

CRANA Council for Remote Area Nurses Australia

DHS Department of Human Services Victoria

DoHA Department of Health and Ageing (Commonwealth)

FACRRM Fellow of ACRRM

FRACGP Fellow of the Royal Australian College of GPs (RACGP)

GPD-V General Practice Divisions - Victoria

HIC Health Insurance Commission (*renamed Medicare Australia as at 1 Oct 2005*)

IMG International Medical Graduate

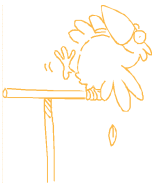
NHMRC National Health and Medical Research Council

NRMFN National Rural Medical Family Network

OTD Overseas Trained Doctor

PIP Practice Incentives Program

RACGP Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
RAP Rural Assessment Panel (RWAV)
RDAA Rural Doctors Association of Australia
RDAV Rural Doctors Association of Victoria
RDRN Rural Doctors Research Network (NSW)
REWS RWAV Education Web Site
RLRP Rural Locum Relief Program
RMEV Rural Medical Education Victoria
RMFN Rural Medical Family Network
RMFSN Rural Medical Family Support Network
ROMPS Rural Other Medical Practitioners
RRAPP Rural and Remote Area Placement Program
RRGPP Rural and Remote General Practice Program
RTP Rural Training Provider
RUSC Rural Undergraduate Support Committee
RWAV Rural Workforce Agency, Victoria Ltd
SARRAH Services for Australian Rural & Remote Allied Health
SBO State Based Organisation (in Victoria, the GPD-V)
VACCHO Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VMO Visiting Medical Officer
WHO World Health Organisation
WONCA World Organisation of Family Doctors
 Phew!



adolescence

A necessary part of growing up!

Most towns offer a variety of sporting activities and a willingness to travel to nearby towns multiplies the choice. Country life for the adolescent may not always be exciting but parties are crashed less often and its not so far when you have to collect them at ungodly hours!

This can be a difficult time for some young people, no matter where they live. Additional support is always available. RMFN offers career counselling for adolescents, as well as for the medical spouse.

Useful link: <http://www.rch.org.au/cah>

See **Career**.

Aeroplanes

Join the enthusiastic flying club / have lessons and get a “birds eye view” of your “neck of the woods”. A great recreational activity and one which will allow you to get about the country easily. Gliding clubs are usually found in rural towns.

After Hours

...which sometimes means Always on Call!

Calls vary enormously depending on your location, the number of doctors in town, and the support from the local hospital. Most small towns have a reasonably considerate population who don't bother the doctor after hours unless they perceive that they have a serious problem. If you remain in town during your days off, you run the risk of your spouse being called back to duty if there is an emergency. If you can come to accept that “always on call” means “always on call even when you're off duty”, then days off can be spent pleasantly as a family in your own home.

As a spouse you too are on call. You may be required to answer the phone if your Doctor spouse is not able to or is occupied with an emergency. Be careful not to be pressured to give medical advice when people pour their troubles out either on the telephone or down town.

With mobile and satellite phones allowing freedom of movement, after hours sharing and a nurtured relationship with hospital nursing staff, it is possible to have a private life without too many interruptions.

Alcohol

A delicious blend of sanity, neatly packaged in attractive recyclable glass. There are some for and againsts but here are some comments from a few rural spouses:

“My husband strongly believes it is not right for him to drink alcohol in public places.”

“If you do drink alcohol you need to watch your consumption, especially when on call 24 hours, seven days a week there is no time you can safely drink to excess.”

“Alcohol is a drug to which anyone can become addicted. Be aware and watchful for yourself and your family.”

“It’s definitely a personal decision as to whether you drink or not, bearing in mind social and professional responsibilities.”

If alcohol is a problem in your life, you can confidentially contact: Victorian Doctor’s Health Program - Telephone: (03) 9495 6011

balance **Balance**

Sometimes it can be hard to maintain the balance in your lives between work and time off. It is important to keep things under control and monitor your priorities with regard to family and relaxation.

“The GP is involved in the practice, stimulated by work and contact with people and it is the spouse who creates a life around the practice. Living in the country near the coast is wonderful. We have a beach nearby and no traffic jams. We try to keep fit and take regular breaks.”
Deborah Jones - Heywood.

banks **Banks**

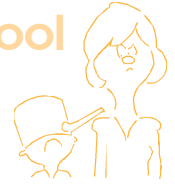
Most towns have some form of banking available. Telephone and Internet banking is usually available which has made access for all much easier.

birthing **Birthing**

Expectations, experiences and outcomes vary with all obstetric care wherever it is performed. Things which may influence your decision to stay or to go:

- Confidence in medical staff, nursing staff, hospital facilities, and obstetric analgesia (ie availability of Caesarean section, emergency evacuation and neo-natal support).
- Your past obstetric experiences.
- Family disruptions, ie (a) schooling; (b) spouse’s time off; (c) availability of accommodation with relatives if you choose to birth away from your country town.
- The positive emotional aspect of delivering in home town should not be ignored.

Boarding School



This can be a very worthwhile and positive experience for country children. It broadens their outlook, teaches independence, self-reliance, tolerance, provides a controlled and caring environment in which to learn to live away from home, which may be necessary once tertiary level is reached. It can be worthwhile enrolling your child or children at a boarding school even if, at present, you have no firm intention of sending them. It provides you with another option when the time comes. It is also wise to start early to make some financial preparation for schooling. If you don't spend it on school fees you won't have any trouble finding something else to spend it on.

Consider and investigate the possibility of your child/children receiving a scholarship.

No need to mention the minuses. They all leap to mind once one starts to contemplate sending children away to school. But most parents of most children who have boarded have few regrets. Bear in mind that a motivated student at a local high school (if you have one) can do extremely well.

See **Information Sheets**.

Breastfeeding

Australian Breastfeeding Association

A great organisation for expectant and nursing mothers which is good for social advice and mother-to-mother support. Local groups normally meet at least once a month. If you don't have a local group a correspondence group is available.

Australian Breastfeeding Association

Victorian Branch
PO Box 4000,
Glen Iris, Victoria 3146
Telephone (03) 9885 0855

HELPLINE is available 24hrs/7 days per week.

Telephone Counselling: (03) 9885 0653

An answering machine provides the name and contact details of the counsellor on roster at the time of the call.

Email Counselling: www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (ANMC)

The national body that assesses the qualifications of overseas nurses and midwives for migration purposes.

General Enquiries: +612 6257 7960

International Assessment Enquiries:

For information about assessments, determinations and applications please contact the **International Section** on:

Telephone: +612 6274 9104 or +612 6274 9110 or access their website: <http://www.anmc.org.au>

busybodies

Be wary of these!

Whether you like it or not everything you say and do will be noticed. Be careful with whom you trust personal information.

career

One of the real problems for spouses moving to rural areas is keeping their career options open. Try as you might, there just may not be the type of job you're trained for. Contact your Division and they may be able to help with contacts for people in your field.

If it is not possible to continue your profession, here are some suggestions from other spouses who have been in the same position as you.

"This could be the beginning of a satisfying new world for you!"

"Get involved in voluntary community work or part-time casual work in another field for a while."

"Enables you to meet people and can be very rewarding."

As well:

- Keep up professional membership.
- Attend further education events regularly.
- Maintain your professional library.
- Most allied health professionals are developing their rural networks.
- Think laterally - try a new direction like starting a small business.
- Use the internet, invest in Broadband.



RMFN offers a Career Counselling service for both spouse/partner and adolescent children of rural medical families. For further information contact the RMFN Office on (03) 9349 7800.

See **Distance Education** and **Practice Management**.

Cars

cars

At least one car is essential. It needs to be reliable and easily serviced (exotic breeds can be a problem). Of course, two cars are better than one.

Childcare

childcare

Childcare facilities are available in most towns. If no formal facilities exist, ask the Kindergarten or Playgroup committees, who will be only too willing to offer their assistance with regard to finding reliable care for your children.

Or, start a baby-sitting club if you have time to do your paybacks.

If you can afford to stay home and look after your children full-time it may be the best job you'll ever do.

Christmas

Christmas

See **Xmas**. I know it doesn't start with 'X' but we couldn't find anything else that does!

Clubs

clubs

Sporting, cultural, community, service, and various children's activity clubs are available and are an excellent way of easing yourself into the community. One of the virtues of rural life is the ready access to a diverse array of clubs. This could be your opportunity to try something new ... and all within easy travelling distance – even if it is to the next town.

Committees

committees

Be careful! People will relish the thought of new blood and new ideas. If these appeals to you, they will do wonders for your self-esteem. One committee which is always on the lookout for new members is the RMFN Committee.

communications



Communication

Write letters! Use email! Telephone calls! Check closely the off-peak times/rates offered by phone companies. Send postcards (especially at first - your friends will be interested to see where you have gone). Ask your children to teach you SMS - they are brilliant at it!

Be prepared to make an extra effort to keep in touch. On days off or visiting the city, you may find it easier to arrange gatherings of groups of friends rather than trying to see everyone individually in the limited time available.

computers

Computers

Computers are now as much a part of our lives as eating and breathing! They have an enormous amount to offer anyone off the beaten track. Think distance education, information gathering, and Sunday's Age crossword. Best of all, email is a wonderful way to keep in touch. Ask your children to introduce you to MSN, make a cup of coffee and settle in to a chat session with three or four of your friends.

An international email address is wonderful when you or your children travel eg 'hotmail' or 'yahoo'.

conferences

Conferences

It is normally worth the effort no matter what the distance to attend a rural medical conference. The interaction and the chance to share experiences with similar-minded people is very therapeutic for both spouses. It is worthwhile skimming through your doctor's mail, looking for conferences and CME events at places where you might want to holiday. The RMFN will more than likely be represented at RDAV and RWAV events and large conferences. See **Practice Management** and **Locum**.

confidentiality

Confidentiality

As a spouse of a medical professional it is important to remember at all times the absolute confidentiality necessary with privileged information.

coping

Coping

Ineffective or effective? - It is really up to you and your ability to adjust to the community. Mostly people will welcome

you and be willing to help if they can, but remember you will feel a sense of isolation at first. New challenges will call for different action, but you will find that by being adaptable and using available resources like the RMFN you will find it easier.

For contact numbers see the RMFN website or Newsletter.

Be brave; make the first move to get involved in the community. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Bush Crisis Line and Support Services

The Bush Crisis Line & Support Services aims to contribute to the retention and wellbeing of multi-disciplinary health practitioners by supporting them and their families to successfully manage the stress associated with remote and rural practice. Their website at <http://www.bcl.org.au> provides information, telephone counselling services, workshops and links, or call **Bush Crisis Line 1800 805 391**.

RMFN Crisis Counselling

RMFN offers a free telephone crisis counselling service. Meridian - Life Development Consultants (Dixie Statham and Rachael Sharman) provide this professional service for rural medical families in rural and remote Victoria.

You may have had a recent crisis in your life, or be in a situation where you have been trying to cope with a problem for a long time. Talking to a counsellor can help you resolve the problems you face and develop better coping skills.

Dixie and Rachael are supportive, and have the professional qualifications and experience to help you. They are only a phone call away. **FREECALL 1800 333 621**

Culture *culture*

It is surprising what choices of cultural activities are available. Many towns have performing arts groups, musical groups, book clubs, food and wine clubs, art groups and Arts Councils. Try one!

Cultural Resource Kit produced by the Rural Workforce Agency, Victoria comprises three guides:

1. A Guide to Regional and Rural Victoria for Overseas Trained Doctors (OTDs) and their families.



2. A Multicultural Introduction for Rural Communities.
3. A Database of Resources for Overseas Trained Doctors (OTDs) and Rural Communities.

Access to the Cultural Resource Kit is available at: <http://www.rmfn-vic.com>

deliveries **Deliveries**

For children see Birthing, for goods read on. Most country stores, if they don't have what you want, will "get it for you!" Of course the delivery time always seems to be longer than they tell you it will be. Strong packaging is essential if people are posting or sending goods by courier or bus as breakages often occur. See **Shopping**.

distance education **Distance Education**

A good idea and keeps the brain working. An excellent opportunity to finish a degree already started or start studying in a field of interest by working towards that piece of paper which will prove you can do what you may already be doing.

Rural university campuses are growing and many offer a wide range of distance education, as do other universities. You may be surprised to find that you are studying quite locally.

divisions of general practice **Divisions of General Practice**

See **Rural Divisions of General Practice**.

doctors health **Doctors' Health**

Victorian Doctor's Health Program

This program provides a confidential and compassionate service for doctors and medical students with health concerns including alcohol, other drug and mental health problems.

Dr Jack Warhaft
Telephone 9495 6011
Level 8, Aikenhead Building,
27 Victoria Parade,
Fitzroy Victoria 3065.



dvd/video **DVD / Video**

See **Video / DVD** and **Family Separation**.

Education

Most country towns have a primary school and a secondary school (perhaps in the next town). Most country secondary schools have programs to meet a range of needs. This is an opportunity for your children to meet local peers and to be educated within a comfortable travelling distance.

There is a plethora of opportunities available which can provide great enrichment for your child – keep an eye out for: language camps, music camps, peer/mentor camps.

Keep in mind once again the balance between sending children away for a high academic education and having a well-rounded locally educated and family involved child at home with you.

See **Boarding Schools, Distance Education, Home Schooling, TAFE and Information Sheets.**

Email

Has changed the world! And brought it much closer to you!

Employment

See **Information Sheets.**

Entertainment

Be prepared to try something new. Look at it as a learning experience and get to know the local industries and recreation. If you are in the mountains, go skiing, if you're on the coast, learn to water-ski or surf-ski. There is always something to do in the country and some of it may be new.

Family Separation

Although inevitable, it can be overcome by issuing repeated invitations and keeping in touch (see **Communication**). Plan days off, holidays or conferences to include family time. Overcome long separations by using video cameras (borrow one if you don't own one) and send photos by email. Keep in touch and remember absence does make the heart grow fonder.

If family is interstate or overseas adjust your budgeting to make regular visiting a priority. See **Video/DVD.**

food and fresh fruit

Check which days the fresh fruit and vegies are delivered to the shops and plan to shop on those days. If they don't stock what you are used to, ask them to "get it in for you." Even better, grow your own if the climate's right.

Have fun learning to cook new foods and enjoy eating them at home.

friends

Are the same the world over. It takes time to find and nurture a true friendship, but you are just as likely to find a true friend in the country as you are in the city. Keep up your previous friendships by inviting people to stay frequently and visit them when you are in town. See **Communication**.

garden

Local advice is helpful when choosing new plant varieties.

This is your chance to find out more about local plants.

Pot plants are great as they can be relocated with you (and entered in the local Show). Keep it simple. It may be different to what you are used to but it can be rewarding.

gliding

Much more common in the country than you think. Go for a drive to watch, and if you seem interested enough, they are sure to ask you if you would like to do a circuit.



Golf

Most towns have a course and if they have sand greens seek local advice as to how to putt but sell your white golf shoes. Most membership fees in the country are very affordable.

gossip

It exists everywhere but is more noticeable in a small community where everyone likes to know what everyone else is doing, especially when it concerns the Doctor's family. Watch you don't divulge anything you may learn which could come under the heading of "medical confidentiality."



Happiness

This is a new stage in your life, make the most of your new situation to try things you might not have considered before. Keep reading this booklet - it may help. See **Lifestyle**.

Health

Take the usual care of your own and your family's health, particularly watch stress levels and try to get time to relax as a family. Take time to find your own GP and encourage your GP spouse to do the same. Your local Division may be able to help.

Holidays are essential, hobbies have to be easily fitted into small time slots but it can all add up to "happiness." If you are really in trouble contact the RMFN Telephone Crisis Counselling service on FREECALL 1800 333 621.

Useful links: <http://medicalboardvic.org.au/index.php>

See **Doctor's Health** and **Information Sheets**.

Hobbies

Either bring your old ones with you or try some new ones through your local TAFE or university. Since you are taking skills to the country, think about holding classes of your own. You may have skills that no one else has in your community, and people are always keen to broaden their interests.

Holidays

Are essential - see **Locum**.

Can be difficult to organize. Learn to think at least six (6) months in advance.

Good breaks are essential. Money is not everything. Sanity is!

Useful links:

<http://wotif.com>

<http://www.au.lastminute.com>

<http://travelmate.com.au>

Home Schooling

See **Information Sheets**.

hospital **Hospital**

Can be a major competition for your spouse's time. You may occasionally remind them they have a home to come home to.

household help **Household Help**

Great idea! Usually available. Ask around for a list of people. Ask neighbours or colleagues for recommendations.

housing **Housing**

See **Information Sheets**.

information sheets **Information Sheets - RMFN**

These RMFN Information Sheets were developed at a Planning Day in discussion with a number of spouses including International Medical Graduate spouses. The issues raised were of enough concern to provide advice and/or a strategy as to how best they could be overcome, or at least be identified as a 'common' issue amongst rural medical families. You are not alone with these issues!

Topics covered are: Education, Employment, Housing for Country GPs, Isolation, Locums, Medical Care for GP Families, Meet and Greet - Family Support, and Quality of Family Life.

Information Sheets can be viewed on the RMFN website: <http://www.rmfn-vic.com>

international medical graduate **International Medical Graduate (IMG)**

Many rural placements are filled by international medical graduates. Families of IMGs, in addition to the issues experienced by the rest of us, face many more issues. These can relate to their own cultural issues, understanding the Australian way of life, as well as financial difficulties to name just a few. In an endeavour to provide as much information as possible the Rural Workforce Agency, Victoria with input from the RMFN Victoria published a three-part guide titled *Cultural Resource Kit*.

An electronic version of this document can be accessed via the RMFN website <http://www.rmfn-vic.com> and the RWAV website <http://www.rwav.com.au>

See **Overseas Trained Doctor (OTD)**.

Internet

See **Computers and WWW**.

Investments

See **Accountants**.

Isolation

Your physical isolation can't be changed unless you move. Your mental isolation can be overcome. Consider membership of clubs, social activities, trips to shows. See **Happiness and Entertainment**, and **Information Sheets**.



Jobs (Tradesmen)

Before employing trades people, source the local knowledge. Use local tradesmen, it makes the world go around. See **Career**.

jobs

Kindergarten

On arriving in your country town you may find that there is only one kindergarten. The kindergarten director will provide you with information about costs, times, etc.



Library

Usually available and they obtain books on rotation from larger centres. If it's not there, ask for it. The librarian will be helpful if you need books for study or special interests. Most libraries databases are now accessible on the internet.

Local Newspaper

A **must read** for the GP and the entire family.

This will keep you up-to-date on local events and personalities in your immediate area.

Local Sport

This is often your 'entree' into the town and your community. It is your opportunity to get to know other people in your community outside of your work environment. Local sports teams **NEED YOU!** Experienced, or not, local sporting teams provide you with the opportunity to 'try out', something that doesn't always happen in the city. Find out

about local sports clubs through your local paper or the Sports Recreation Officer at your local shire/council, or 'ask' someone in your neighbourhood. See **Tennis**.

locums **Locums**

Locums are in great demand so it may be worthwhile to plan ahead if you need one. There are locum subsidies for rural GPs to attend Continuing Professional Development and recreational leave. Many of the rural Divisions in Victoria have their own locums so consult the appropriate Division number in this booklet.

If a locum is not available you may need to make the most of exotic short breaks eg a long weekend, but more of them – by the sea, in the snow. See **Information Sheets**.



lifestyle **Lifestyle**

It is important to have an attitude of “what can I give to the community” not “what can I get out of it.” Be friendly and approachable to all. See **Happiness, Entertainment, Isolation** and **Information Sheets**.

mail order **Mail Order**

Can be reliable and interesting, also gives you more choice for Christmas shopping and the like, if you can't get away to shop. Ezibuy www.ezibuy.com.au is a good place to start. Ring their Customer Service free on 1800 333 222. The Wilderness Society has great gift ideas, phone freecall 1800 035 354 for a catalogue.

Increasingly, people are turning to the Internet to shop. Most merchandisers provide the right kinds of security to make Internet shopping safe and a breeze. Try wishlist.com.au or dstore.com.au.



meals **Meals**

Microwaves make it easy to be flexible with the timing of meals, as timing can vary greatly if your spouse is on call.

medical care **Medical Care for GP Families**

See **Information Sheets**.

Medical Students

Usually great fun and good value. If your spouse has not yet had the pleasure of assisting a medical student, we suggest you contact one of the numbers below.

Victorian Medical Postgraduate Foundation (VMPF)

Level 8, Aikenhead Wing, St Vincent's Hospital
27 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy, Victoria 3065
(03) 9415 1177

University of Melbourne School of Medicine

(03) 8344 5890

Monash University School of Medicine

(03) 9905 4301

This is your opportunity to help students to understand the many benefits of working in a rural setting so that one day they might want to come and work in your town.

Mentor

RMFN has a number of members trained as mentors. This is someone who has had a similar experience to yours and who is happy to talk to you about what is happening in your life. Check the committee members to find the mentor closest to you and don't hesitate to give them a ring.

Network

Latest buzzword, we couldn't leave it out. Our group provides the support network you may be looking for. It's very casual.

Newbie

That's you.

New Year - religious days, festivals and traditional holidays

In Australia these are now many and varied depending on a persons religious/cultural background.

A brief outline of the major religious observances of the world's main religions can be found in the RWAV Cultural Resource Kit booklet *A Multicultural Introduction for Rural Communities*. See **Culture**.

nothing to do

A myth propagated by city people who know someone about to move to the country but who have never lived in rural communities themselves. See **Entertainment** and then invite them for a weekend in the country.

nmaa

Stands for Nursing Mothers' Association of Australia. It was set up in 1964 to encourage and support breastfeeding mothers and their families. It continues to do these things, but in August 2001, NMAA changed its name to the Australian Breastfeeding Association. See **Breastfeeding (Australian Breastfeeding Association)**.

other doctors and spouses

Often just like you only they may have "been there and done that". We're only a phone call away. Be prepared to travel and meet up with other GP families. It is invaluable to exchange experiences.

overseas trained doctor (OTD)

See **International Medical Graduate (IMG)**.

paperwork

Most doctors need help in this area, preferably someone to take over. If you're willing, See **Practice Management**.



patients

An endless necessity. Be wary of those who expect you to have medical knowledge just because you're married to a doctor.



pets

Usually they adapt to new surroundings though travel may be difficult. Don't boil the goldfish in the car and don't let the cat eat all the fish from the freezer you just defrosted because you were moving. Other than that, they add a touch of home to the house you haven't yet settled into.

One of the advantages of moving to rural areas is that you can extend on the pet repertoire of city pets. Try a pet pig,

or foster the native animals in your area by planting native trees. Native animals make really low maintenance pets and are really one of the joys of rural life.

Playgroup

Great way to meet a diverse group of parents with children the same age as yours. Most towns have an active group, or if not, start one yourself.

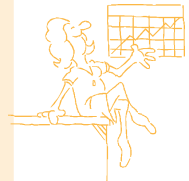
Post Graduate Study

If your spouse is attending a CPD activity away from home, a subsidised locum may be available. Contact your Division.

The Rural Medical Family Network often holds both formal and informal events at major conferences. Conferences also sometimes offer Practice Management for spouses as well as childcare facilities. For your own study keep in contact with your own professional organisation to see what is available.

Practice Management

Doctors' spouses sometimes arrive in a rural community where there is little chance of employment, depending on their area of expertise. If your spouse has a private practice, you may wish to become the Practice Manager. Good records are essential in these times, as it is no longer a question of "if" but a question of "when" will the doctor be audited by the taxation department. The doctor's time is more effectively spent treating patients rather than spending time on administration, which isn't really their forte. It is a form of income sharing because if you do the work you can collect a salary for your efforts. The Australian Association of Practice Managers (Ph: 03 9663 1960) offers support, guidance and on-going education to those people wishing to make a career of this. Contact the rural representative of their association for more details.



Private Time

Something that needs to be worked at, if you find you are missing it. See **After Hours**.

Quality of Family Life

See **Information Sheets**.

questions

Questions

Who to ask is often the hardest one to answer. If you're unsure one option would be to ring another rural doctor's spouse. Often we have had the same problem and will know the best person to ask. All RMFN committee members can be contacted if need be through the RMFN Office on (03) 9349 7800.

See **Culture** and **Culture Resource Kit** at:
<http://www.rmfn-vic.com>

religion

Religion

This can make your move to a small community much easier because most religious country groups put on some sort of welcome for newcomers to the town. Remember though, your particular denomination may not be represented, so be prepared to be adaptable and ecumenical.

restaurants

Restaurants



A comment from a rural spouse: "I used to love sitting in ethnic or specialist restaurants with a bottle of wine and a few friends and being asked to leave when we disturbed other patrons." Things change but if you've got a restaurant in your country town then use it so it doesn't go broke. If you haven't, then save and diet so you can go out on your days off or holidays. Dinner for the two of you is often a wonderful time to talk, so if you haven't a restaurant it's probably worthwhile picking one night a month to cook a special dinner, put the children to bed early, dress up and pretend you're out to dinner (wash up the next day)

Consider paying someone to cook a meal for you once a month. Put the children to bed and enjoy a bottle of wine with your partner.

rdav

RDAV

RDAV is the Rural Doctors' Association of Victoria. It was formed to create a network for rural doctors and the strength of this group may surprise you.

Website: <http://www.rdav.com.au>

rural divisions of general practice

Rural Victoria is divided into 15 Rural Divisions of General Practice. The aim of Divisions is to provide support for rural GPs by developing Continuing Medical Education Programs, specific projects to meet the needs of GPs and the people they service. Some Divisions even provide a Locum to assist GPs with time out from General Practice. There's a list of Rural Divisions and phone numbers in this booklet if you or your Doctor spouse need to contact them.

Very good with practice management support also. Make the most of them.

Website: <http://www.gpdv.com.au>

School

See **Boarding School, Distance Education, Home Schooling, TAFE and Information Sheets.**

Shopping

It varies from one town to the next but basics are always available. If something is not available local shopkeepers will oblige and "get it in for you." Try to plan trips away to larger centres to include as much shopping as possible. Keep a list of items you can't buy locally (food, craft, materials) and stock up while you are away. Make sure you have an Esky or car fridge, particularly on a hot day and make sure that it is an upright and it works well.



Small Communities

The common perception is that small towns are problems for newbies. This may be true to begin with but like most changes, once you get used to the town and the town gets used to you, things will settle down.

Gossip can be a problem, but more often than not it's prompted by interest, not malice. Doctors and their families still have a special position in the community and you will be 'on show' at first. You will get used to it!

Staff

If you inherit staff they can be a real asset as they know the ins and outs of the surgery and the town. Negotiate a



settling period when you first arrive to allow all parties to adjust to the new regime. This is also important when you are hiring additional staff. If you are the practice manager you may be more aware of the staffing problems than the doctor so keep them informed.

stress **Stress**

Learn debriefing skills to help your spouse. Talk to another spouse to help yourself. See **Doctors' Health, RMFN Telephone Crisis Counselling Service - FREECALL 1800 333 621**

tafe **TAFE**

Although the courses available in small country towns may not be as extensive as provincial centres, it is worthwhile contacting your local convenor and expressing an interest in certain courses, eg computer skills, silversmithing, etc. This is because interest has to be shown before these courses can be made available. This change in lifestyle could provide the opportunity to do something you've never had time for previously, especially if you've put your career on "hold" for this move.

Useful links:

<http://www.tafe.vic.gov.au>

<http://vic.gov.au>

television **Television**

Most Victorian towns now have excellent TV reception and receive most channels although their programming may differ a little from those in the city. If your favourite show is not available on your local station ask a friend or relative to tape it for you (without the adverts) and send it to you. Satellite television and Pay TV (which is another option) provide educational programs.



tennis **Tennis**

Another great way to meet people, get a bit of exercise, and become part of the community. Most country towns have at least social tennis clubs, and often fixtures for the really keen.

Tertiary Correspondence

See **Distance Education**.

Travel

When you travel away from your country town:

- Carry food, drink and activities for the kids and be sure to take regular breaks to rest. Beware of problems such as kangaroos, straying animals and long lonely roads with few distractions. When you travel back to your country town, beware of all the above plus tiredness. Allow time to unpack, do the mail and for the doctor to catch up on paperwork!
- Fuel - gas or diesel. Make sure you have enough to get where you are going! Sometimes you will find great distances between petrol stations. With new 'by-passes' being created this often means that unless you make a point of turning off into a town, the freeway will take you past your usual fill-up station.
- You may find that relatives use distance as an excuse not to travel out to you. If you really want them to visit, be persistent and offer them weekends when your local Show or race meeting or festival is on as an added incentive. As a last resort, plan a family Christmas in your new town (don't forget to organise the locum) or if that doesn't work, threaten to move further away. It may help to advise them where the best fuel and meal breaks are available.



If travel is one of your ambitions, this may be the perfect opportunity to save for it. It is often hard to justify one's enjoyment of travel, especially outside of Australia, to people who haven't been as far as the capital city of their State, or even the nearest big city - but don't be daunted and don't feel guilty.

Useful links:

<http://www.travelmate.com.au>

<http://www.racv.com.au>

Unhappiness

Be realistic and expect some "down" times. Try to tackle your new location and status as an adventure. Don't forget

that unhappiness isn't confined to rural postings. You can be unhappy in the city as easily as in the country, and it's not usually caused solely by the environment. Country living can be a wonderful experience for a family as long as you don't take city expectations with you. Be prepared for a "different" lifestyle, rather than seeing it as "better" or "worse." Try to focus on the new and different things or people around you rather than the familiar places or people you have left behind. Happiness is a state of mind - work on it.

university **University Medical Clubs**

See **Medical Students**.

video **Video / DVD**

Make sure you take it with you. Videos can be a very useful source for updating your professional education, and for entertainment borrow the latest movie from your video shop. Exchanging home videos is also an excellent way to keep in touch with distant relatives. More recently the use of computer DVDs is another excellent way of keeping in touch with family and friends, no matter how far away. See **Television** and **Family Separation**.

vision **Vision**

RMFN has one!

To Be A Strong Grass Roots Network Of All Victorian Rural Medical Families

visitors **Visitors**

They are usually great fun. Try to take time to enjoy them and show them your new lifestyle. See **Travel** if you don't end up with the visitors you want.

wine **Wine**

Wine is a growing industry and chances are your area will have some vineyards. Alternatively, consult mail order catalogues, or try the internet.

World Wide Web

The RMFN is on the WWW.

Its home page is <http://www.rmfn-vic.com>

Worried?

Contact an RMFN mentor.

Xmas

Christmas away from family and friends, particularly for the first time, can be a very daunting prospect, but can provide an opportunity to establish some new traditions, or variations of familiar Christmas rituals. Some suggestions:

- Invite other family members for a Christmas visit.
- Invite a couple of other families in the same situation to have Christmas dinner with you, and share the catering.
- Invite one or two elderly and “alone for Christmas” people to share part of the day with you - excellent substitute grandparents if yours are far away.

You

You are important. Keep telling yourself this.

Zenith

Country Life could be the high point of your life.



useful phone numbers

division phone numbers

Ballarat Division of General Practice (03) 5331 6303
Bendigo and District Division of General Practice (03) 5441 7806
Border Division of General Practice (02) 6056 3814
Central Highlands Division of General Practice (03) 5428 4848
Central West Gippsland Division of General Practice (03) 5126 2899
Eastern Ranges GP Association (03) 9739 6751
East Gippsland Division of General Practice (03) 5153 0383
General Practice Association of Geelong (03) 5229 1922
Goulburn Valley Division of General Practice (03) 5831 5399
Mallee Division of General Practice (03) 5023 8633
Murray-Plains Division of General Practice (03) 5456 4086
North East Victoria Division of General Practice (03) 5754 1226
Otway Division of General Practice (03) 5593 2684
South Gippsland Division of General Practice (03) 5674 3105
West Vic Division of General Practice (03) 5352 4804

Victorian doctor's health program

Telephone (03) 9495 6011