They say time flies when you’re having fun, and I can definitely confirm this. RVTS’s tenth year of training GP registrars remotely disappeared as fast as the previous nine.

RVTS has come a long way since the inaugural group of registrars phoned in for their first teletutorial. Back then RVTS was an idea yet to be proven. A decade later the program is an important part of the Australian Government’s rural healthcare strategy.

2010 was another year of significant growth. The Australian Government continued its support by committing funds to mid 2013. This provides for a 45 per cent increase in our annual intake.

The RVTS family is both growing and staying at home for longer. Almost 70 applications were received for the 2011 intake, and the 22 successful candidates hail from a wider range of regions than ever before.

We also saw a dramatic increase in the number of existing registrars enrolling in advanced skills training; and we recruited some former registrars into our medical education team.

During 2010 we also tried our hand at: quality certification; a long-term education plan; buying training manikins; producing a training video; and piloting a workshop for practice managers.

We’ve achieved a lot over the past decade, thanks in no small part to the commitment of too many individuals to mention. I thank you all.

Pat Giddings
Chief Executive Officer

Three years ago I was a junior doctor relieving in Charleville, Queensland, never dreaming I could achieve so much. But since joining RVTS my skills have developed, lessons have been learnt (some the hard way), and exams passed.

Despite working in a remote location, I always felt incredibly supported. Without this support I would have likely retreated to the city after a brief stint as a reliever. I’m grateful this was not so.

My thanks go out to everyone at RVTS for their contribution to my training.

I must also express my gratitude to fellow 2008 cohort members, from whom I have learnt so much. I think I can speak for all whose training is drawing to a close when I say we will miss being part of the RVTS family.

Thanks also for supporting me as Registrar Liaison Officer. It’s a post I have really enjoyed and I hope I have made a positive contribution.

Andrew Wilke
Registrar Liaison Officer

Over the past year, the role of Supervisor Liaison Officer has been a rewarding one, as it has led me to a greater understanding of the internal workings of RVTS. This has strengthened my admiration for a unique organisation.

The liaison role has not been particularly demanding, as experienced rural general practitioners generally express their views as they arise; these have largely been supportive and positive. The year’s second workshop in Cairns relied more heavily on the skills and experience of supervisors than previously, which led to a much richer experience for registrars and supervisors alike.

Thanks must go to Tim Lloyd-Morgan, for his educational support and encouragement, and the RVTS staff, particularly Debra Hargreave for her assistance with organisational matters. As I move into a new role as the Senior Medical Educator, I look forward to receiving advice and feedback from supervisors and the new Supervisor Liaison Officer, so we can continue to improve RVTS.

George Cerchez
Supervisor Liaison Officer

RVTS People 2010

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Baradine, NSW
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Barham, NSW
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Indulkana, SA
Injune, QLD
Innisfail, QLD
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Kowanyama, QLD
Kyogle, NSW
Lake Cargelligo, NSW
Lake Nash, NT
Leeton, NSW
Maningrida, NT
Miles, QLD
Millmerran, QLD
Mimili, SA
Minjilang, NT

Mount Isa, QLD
Mount Newman, WA
Mundubbera, QLD
Mungindi, QLD
Murrurundi, NSW
Nelly Bay, QLD
Nganamarryanga, NT
Nubeena, TAS
Nyirripi, NT
Palm Island, QLD
Pine Creek, NT
Pukatja, SA
Queenstown, TAS
Quilpie, QLD
Tabubil, PNG
Tara, QLD
Taroom, QLD
Tea Gardens, NSW
Tennant Creek, NT
Tenterfield, NSW
Texas, QLD

Theodore, QLD
Tieri, QLD
Timber Creek, NT
Tiwi Islands, NT
Trangie, NSW
Trundle, NSW
Tully, QLD
Utopia, NT
Walgett, NSW
Walungurr, NT
Walwa, VIC
Warakurna, WA
Yarrabah, QLD
Yuendumu, NT
Yulara, NT
The Journey

The year is 1999, the Y2K bug is threatening to destroy the planet, mobile phones aren’t yet in charge of our lives, and the idea of remote GP training is the stuff of science fiction.

The town is Mungindi, straddling the Queensland-New South Wales border.

The man is Dr Christian Rowan, Mungindi Hospital’s Medical Superintendent with right of private practice.

The question is a simple one: why is a general practitioner required to move from their town to access vocational training?

Fortunately for Mungindi, their local member happened to be the then Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson. Spirited community lobbying was heard at the highest level, and the machinery of government swung into action to find a solution.

Gears grinded, belts whirled, lights flashed and electronics beeped; the Pilot Remote Vocational Training Scheme (PRVTS) was born. A local problem became a nationwide solution.

The PRVTS started with just 11 registrars, a diverse bunch hailing from locations as varied as Bamaga on Cape York and Hopetoun in Victoria’s Mallee.

But the program had its share of skeptics. Claims that it would fail, that it was a waste of money, and that it was impossible to deliver vocational training via distance education, were voiced with conviction.

The program was originally administered by a joint committee managed by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM). With a steering committee comprising a group of luminary thinkers (that now reads like a who’s who of rural health) PRVTS was in good hands.

The skeptics have long since been silenced. The program was a roaring success right from the start. Doctors raved and communities swooned.

In 2003 the P for Pilot was dropped. Three years later, an independent company, Remote Vocational Training Scheme Ltd, was established to manage the program’s growth. RVTS continues to grow thanks to the ongoing support of the Australian Government.

The success of the RVTS over the past decade has proven beyond doubt that distance education and remote supervision for general practitioners doesn’t just work, but it’s capable of providing training every bit as good as in-house alternatives. Ultimately this is only the cherry on the cake. The communities lucky enough to have an RVTS registrar retain their doctor, a doctor who is no longer isolated, but supported no matter how remote they are.
Feedback from the 2010 Registrar Satisfaction Survey:

- “RVTS is a key factor in my retention in rural medicine.”
- “My consulting has improved out of sight.”
- “The best workshops I have ever attended.”
- “It’s a great program. Long may it flourish and prosper!”
- “Help with difficult clinical decisions is only a phone call away.”

Weekly Teletutorials

The phone lines ran hot in 2010 with 88 teletutorials being conducted. Our admiration goes out to all the registrars, presenters and facilitators who forgo an early dinner and a night curled up on the couch to make these weekly education sessions a success. Feedback from registrars was overwhelmingly positive, praise being given for the wide range of topics and the quality of presenters. The regular interaction between registrars also scored highly. The old-fashioned telephone retains its position as communications method of choice for hosting teletutorials, although the web-based Elluminate program was used on four occasions to deliver mental health skills training, and may play a larger role in future.

Education Workshops

The year started with a double bang: two workshops being held at Bondi Beach within weeks of each other. The 2010 cohort kept the lungs pumping at the St. Vincents Hospital Airway Skills Centre, and eyes sparkling during Ophthalmology, the most popular sessions of workshop one. At workshop two, the Obstetric Clinical Cases session was the clear stand-out, scoring the highest feedback rating from 100 per cent of the 2008 and 2009 cohort registrars. Workshop three, held in Cairns in October, offered small groups and more skill stations than you could poke a stethoscope at; a wildly popular format. As always, an action-packed family program kept the kids’ faces painted and cameras clicking at local attractions.

Clinical Teaching Visits

It was an action-packed year of Clinical Teaching Visits (CTVs), with our band of fearless visitors undertaking 80 expeditions into the unknown. Frances Poliniak takes out the 2010 CTVs Bravery Award for venturing into a fogbank that was thicker than your grandma’s pea soup, miraculously arriving on time and with her rental car the right side up. Peter Burrows conducted a marathon five CTVs in a row, so has obtained Gold Frequent Traveller status and access to the RVTS Club at all major bus stations (ok, it’s a foot locker). Back at mission control, Bambi Ward sat in the director’s chair for RVTS’s first training video, which was designed to assist clinical teaching visitors develop their feedback skills.
Training Doctors in Remote Communities
for Remote Communities

“An Australian Government Initiative”

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