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Nurse shortage addressed in the Riverina

Celebrating International Nurses Day (12 May) the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) has hailed the first phase of a pilot program encouraging nurses into general practice to address growing workforce shortages a complete success.

The pilot program run by the Riverina Division of General Practice and Primary Health based in the NSW regional city of Wagga Wagga, had 20 places available for the course. It attracted an overwhelming 60 expressions of interest from local and state-wide applicants to participate in a week long nursing refresher course.

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said the program targeted nurses who had left the profession and were interested in re-discovering nursing and learning more about the benefits of general practice.

"This pilot was not designed to attract community or hospital nurses, they are desperately needed in their existing roles. This pilot was about attracting nurses who had been out of the profession for less than five years into general practice.

"Practice nurses play a key role in the general practice team. They perform many procedures such as pap smears, immunisations, wound management and promote and deliver health education. This frees up the GP's time to concentrate on more complex medical problems and coordinate care arrangements for those with chronic illness," Dr Hobbs said.

The 20 successful applicants will attend a five day workshop covering topics such as the business aspects of general practice along with clinical sessions focusing on the core functions of practice nursing.

AGPN CEO Kate Carnell said the incredible response suggests the pilot program has the potential to be rolled out across the country.

"The phenomenal response has been from people with a range of ages and from various backgrounds. I am confident the workshop will be beneficial to participants.

"The more skilled practice nurses made available will improve patient access to GPs. This is essential in areas of need. A recent survey of rural GPs indicated the workloads in these rural areas less appealing to GPs.

"Utilising the skills of health care professionals such as practice nurses is one way to address these problems.

"Practice nurses have enormous professional commitment and make valuable contributions to communities in which they work and I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate the successful participants in this pilot and all of Australia's dedicated nurses.

For more information phone AGPN CEO Kate Carnell on 0415 662 266