

## **RURAL DOCTOR OF THE YEAR 2005**

### **DR NIGEL HOFFMAN**

During the 13<sup>th</sup> National Family Practitioners Conference held in Mthatha from 5-7<sup>th</sup> August 2005, the prestigious Pierre Jaques Rural Doctor of the Year prize was awarded to Dr Nigel Hoffman from Rietvlei Hospital in the Eastern Cape.

It was fitting that it was presented at the conference dinner when the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the South African Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care was celebrated.

The award is co-sponsored by the Rural Doctors' Association of Southern Africa (RuDASA), the South African Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care and the South African Medical Association. Heinemann Publishers supports RuDASA in this by donating a set of its Primary Clinical Care manuals.

The decision to give the award to Dr Hoffmann was a difficult one given the number of high quality nominations that were received. A very strong contender was Dr Ntodeni Ndwamato, the Chairperson of RuDASA, who was nominated for the sterling work that she has been doing, especially over the last year, in representing and promoting rural health, at the same time as carrying a heavy workload in the rural area in which she works. However, the Committee decided that in the interests of openness and fairness the award should not be given to a fellow committee member, and chose Nigel Hoffman.

Dr Hoffmann has worked at Rietvlei Hospital in the Umzimkulu district of the Eastern Cape for more than sixteen years, much of this time as the medical manager of the hospital. Rietvlei has all the usual difficulties associated with a rural district hospital but perhaps more so because it lies in an enclave of the Eastern Cape surrounded by KwaZuluNatal and is furthest from the provincial head office. Under Dr Hoffman's leadership, Rietvlei has been a pilot site for many programmes over the years including the PMTCT programme and the Fred Hollows Cataract Programme.

However, the award is not simply for long service. In the last year, on the initiative of Dr Hoffman, the hospital has started up and run an anti-retroviral treatment programme as a first wave site in the Eastern Cape. This has happened in the midst of severe staff shortages in the hospital, major renovations that have been taking place over the last two years and the relocation of the Hoffman family to Kokstad, resulting in Nigel having to do long commutes and spend many nights away from home. What is particularly noteworthy is that his house was burnt to the ground due to an electric fault last year leading to the loss of everything that was in it. (Fortunately at the time of the fire his family was away on holiday and he was in the hospital attending to an emergency!) In spite of this he has continued undaunted in his task.

Dr Hoffman was at the dinner to receive the award with his wife Claire, who

has been a great support and herself worked at Rietvlei as a doctor for many years, and with his daughter Rebecca, the youngest of his four children.

In accepting the award, an obviously humble and surprised Dr Hoffmann quietly expressed his appreciation to RuDASA and its partners for the award. Nigel commented: "I really love my job. We are very fortunate to work in a rural area. Rural areas are where the people are. I was inspired by people who came before me. The challenge is to inspire the next generation so that others will also choose to work in rural areas". Congress participants attending the dinner, obviously moved by these words and acknowledging the important contribution that Nigel has made, rose to give him a standing ovation.

RuDASA thus acknowledges the sterling contribution of Dr Nigel Hoffman, supported by Claire and his children, and wishes them well as they continue to serve the community of Umzimkulu district.

Ian Couper  
Past Chairperson  
RuDASA



Drs Nigel and Claire Hoffman