



**Press Release**  
**Foreign qualified doctor honoured with Rural Doctor of the Year**  
**2011 Award**  
**14 September 2011**

The winner of the prestigious Pierre Jacques Rural Doctor of the Year Award was announced at the Rural Health conference in the quaint village of Rhodes on 9 September 2011. This year it was awarded to Dr. KR Adigun from Bethal hospital in Mpumalanga Province.

The Rural Doctors Association of Southern Africa (RuDASA) inaugurated this annual award in 2002. The award is given to a rural doctor, working at the coal face, who is judged by the RuDASA Committee to have made a significant contribution towards rural health in the previous year. The award is sponsored by the HIV Clinician's Society and Africa Health Placements.

Dr. Adigun is recognised for mobilising the community of Bethal for the HIV counselling and testing (HCT) campaign, and for convincing many health workers to test as well. When President Jacob Zuma launched the HCT campaign in April 2010, members of the Bethal community were not coming forward to do the test because they were scared of the possibility of a positive result, the subsequent stigma and loss of their lives.



**Dr Adigun, a driving force in HIV/TB community oriented primary Care.** © Chris Bateman

In line with the National Department of Health policy, Dr. Adigun developed a blue print of HIV/TB community oriented primary care (COPC) where the community takes responsibility for the HCT/TB campaign. He consulted widely and was able to mobilize the whole community to take ownership of the campaign. The involvement of several local businesses and industries, that donated a variety of items that were given to individuals who tested, contributed to the success of the campaign. Those who tested were encouraged to be ambassadors for the HCT campaign and in turn encouraged others to test.

Dr Adigun targeted health workers to test as well. Many have thanked him, and one health worker said: "Thank you for encouraging me to test. I never knew I had this disease, now I am on anti-retrovirals. You saved my life!" Through this initiative and activities of Dr. Adigun and his team, many lives were saved including members of the health care profession that could have been lost to the dreadful combination of HIV and TB.

Rural hospitals in South Africa are very dependent on foreign qualified doctors to provide health services. In Mpumalanga, where Dr. Adigun works, 80% of the doctors in rural district hospitals are foreign qualified. Without them, many rural South Africans would be unable to access health care services. While every country would prefer to employ locally trained

doctors, the international experience is that it is difficult to attract enough locally trained health professionals. Even in the United Kingdom, 25% of workforce in the NHS are foreign qualified. RuDASA recognises the value of foreign qualified doctors, and appreciates their essential contribution to the health care of the nation.

### **Eastern Cape Rural Doctor of the Year Award**

As the conference was held in the Eastern Cape, a second award was given to honour the Eastern Cape Rural Doctor of the Year. Dr Liz Gatley from Zithulele Hospital was recognised for her commitment to rural health. After her community service in 2009, she stayed on at her hospital, rather than returning to the city or going into private practice as many of her peers did. She became one of the senior doctors that provide stability for the staff, support to the clinical leadership and ongoing care for her patients. This makes a notable impact on sustaining programmes and quality care – providing a bridge between enthusiastic community service or foreign qualified staff who come for a year and the small minority of people who see rural health care as a long term career.



Dr Gatley has been described by a colleague as follows “She is well known at Zithulele for quietly going the extra mile. She has baked cakes for long-stay patients on their birthdays, cooked boerewors for severe burn patients who were getting insufficient protein from the hospital kitchen, bought patients clothes for Christmas and often helps patients with transport money. Her ability to see her patients as people and treat them with dignity, often crying with them in joy and sorrow, demonstrates what is best about rural family medicine.”

**Dr Liz Gatley, a rural doctor quietly going the extra mile for her patients.** © Chris Bateman

Despite the huge challenges in rural health care that were discussed at the rural conference, there are pockets of excellence, where ordinary people do extraordinary things. RuDASA is delighted to recognise colleagues who are outstanding role models and inspire us.

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### **Some facts on foreign qualified doctors in South Africa**

Research done by Africa Health Placements (AHP), an organisation that recruits doctors for rural hospitals, has found that only 35 doctors per year remain in rural hospitals after community service. Of the 1200 medical graduates per year, half emigrate, 75% work in the private sector, and 75% of those that stay public also stay urban. In comparison, AHP has placed 365 foreign qualified doctors in rural hospitals in 2010. The foreign qualified doctors are willing to work in dire conditions of staff shortages, making it easier for local doctors to join an existing team. They often provide the personal and professional support so critically needed in attracting and retaining a rural health workforce.