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MEDIA RELEASE

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A COUNTRY PRACTICE

Around 70 of Australia's newest – soon to be – frontline veterinarians have visited Dubbo to get a firsthand look at what it would be like to swap working in the city for a country practice. Once graduated, they will be part of the next generation of vets who enter animal medicine fulltime amid a nation-wide shortage of vets and high demand for their skills across diverse sectors, including domestic, agriculture and livestock, and the nation's food supply chain workforce.

The third-year veterinary students from the University of Sydney and Charles Sturt University (CSU) Wagga Wagga were hosted by Dr Duncan McGinness, Pet Medical Centre (Dr Ross Pedrana), Fur Life Vet Dubbo, and Orana Veterinary Services. The visit made possible through generous industry support and sponsors covering the cost to get students to the region.

Running into its third decade, the visiting university program was originally started by some of the region's local vets to attract new veterinarians to the country. Mixed with the country appeal and high caseloads students seek when choosing their placements, this most recent visit ensures rural and regional areas like Dubbo are top-of-mind when it comes to deciding where to start their careers.

"These visits are critical and essential to making sure the next generation of vets see and experience early on that opportunity abounds for them in the country," said Dr McGinness. "There is a genuine lure to work as a vet in the country, and Dubbo vets, along with our mixed practices colleagues from Warren, Coonamble, Gilgandra, Mudgee and Wellington are keen to showcase our region to these students through relaxed and informal style visits like this – a formula which makes these visits popular among students.

"The working environment for vets in the country, especially in our region, is far more supportive than what it was when my generation graduated from university and hit the workforce," said Dr McGinness. "Nowadays, thanks to changes in the way we work and how practices are run and being supported by more skilled and qualified vet nurses, it is providing vets with greater flexibility to enjoy a healthier work life balance, work part-time, and raise their family.

"The reality is, many country practices are well-equipped with tech, and offer services proportionate to their communities and clients," said Dr McGinness. "While we are connected to specialists in the city, sometimes vets out in the bush are 'it', and that can be just as rewarding as it is challenging."

After arriving on Saturday and having lunch at the Western Plains Cultural Centre, students were welcomed to the city by the Mayor of Dubbo Regional Council, Councillor Josh Black. Also on hand, representatives from council's economic development team, and Regional Development Australia – all dedicated to supporting professionals and essential services workers move to the region.

While there are still a few years of study ahead and continuous learning for these students, early feedback regarding the visit to the region was positive. Many students now acutely aware of the benefits regions like Dubbo have to offer for work and play, making their decision to follow mixed practice or large animals a little more exciting. Regardless of their future choice, the vets of the region who hosted this most recent visit have assured the third-year students – there is plenty of work, opportunities, and professional growth pathways ahead of them by moving west.

"When you factor in things like the cost of living and housing affordability, living and working in the country wins hands down compared to city-living", said Dr McGinness. "That's something we certainly showcased over the weekend to these future leaders and specialists in animal medicine during their visit."

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