

National Rural Faculty

The RACGP's National Rural Faculty has more than 10,000 members from all over the country. It is designed to support and advocate for rural GPs by:

- developing resources to assist GPs working in rural and remote Australia
- awarding the Fellowship in Advanced Rural General Practice (FARGP)
- administering the Rural Procedural Grants Program (RPGP) and the rural Locum Education Assistance Program (LEAP)
- offering advice and guidance to students and registrars through hosting Rural Health Career Checks
- promoting general practice in rural and remote Australia
- directly contributing to rural health policy reforms.

Visit www.racgp.org.au/rural for more information.

>> Shenouda also acknowledges the help of the RACGP's resources and publications in helping to start and successfully run his own general practice.

'The RACGP website had a feature about how to start up your own general practice and had some quality guidelines. That was a big part of what helped me to set up my practice,' he said.

'I also visited a lot of practices that had won awards in the 10 years prior.'

Shenouda's advice for any GPs, registrars and even medical students who are thinking about opening their own practice is to always plan ahead.

'You need to understand what you are up to and it is not just a financial investment. You need to invest in time spent looking at different models of care, see where you fit in, then design your own model,' he said.

'It is good to start with a clear vision of what you want to achieve in your community. Then you need to look at how you are going to achieve this vision and put a business plan to suit.'

Building and maintaining relationships with members of the local community is one of the key visions at Glenrock Country Practice.

'The community is absolutely very important to general practice, and the other way round as well,' Shenouda said. 'My best example is The Rock community [in the NSW Riverina region], where in the beginning there wasn't a lot of acceptance for me and I was only seeing a couple of patients a day.'

'I found out the reason for that was because of the concerns for continuity of care and, thinking about it, I decided that the best thing to do would be to start up a medical clinic and have a GP there every day.'

Shenouda's commitment to The Rock has resulted in a daily GP service as well as allied health services every fortnight. Glenrock Country Practice's commitment to its community was recognised when it was awarded the RACGP NSW&ACT Faculty's General Practice of the Year Award in 2007. The practice was also given the 2010 AGPAL Quality and Safety Practice of the Year and the Consumer Participation Award.

Rural medicine

While his stay in Wagga Wagga was initially planned as a short-term adventure, the strong bond Shenouda formed with his community was what ultimately made him stay.

'The irony was that I went to Wagga Wagga assuming that I was going to stay for a year or six months or so,' he said.

'It was a combination of loving general practice and the people, and the opportunity of change that came to me in Wagga Wagga that contributed to the stay. Now I've been here for over 15 years.'

The disparity and maldistribution of primary healthcare professionals, especially GPs, in rural and remote medicine has been a concern for Shenouda for several years.

'What most city doctors don't get is the connection with the community, especially a smaller community like Wagga Wagga, and it is something that I really appreciate and cherish,' Shenouda said.

'If you are able to communicate honestly and caringly with people in the community, and you back them up with their ideas and dreams, it can happen. Many city doctors may choose not to come to rural areas because they feel isolated, but I think they'll change their minds if they give it a go.'

It may have started out as a short stay, but Shenouda's time in rural NSW has led to the formation of a number of relationships among the people of Wagga Wagga, where he is now part of the local fabric.

'In smaller communities, you are part of a community and you are an individual in the community who can make a big difference because you learn from them and contribute to it,' Shenouda said.

Shenouda believes rural and remote GPs need to be prepared for the variety and challenges that come through the door, which is the very nature of general practice.

'The thing about general practice, especially out in places like Wagga Wagga, is that you learn about uncertainty and you must learn how to deal with that,' he explained.

'My advice to students and registrars is always to start as a GP and get equipped to be a resilient doctor. That way you can go on to develop whichever advanced skills meet the needs of your community, and emergency medicine may be the one that is needed the most.'

Shenouda runs Glenrock Country Practice together with his wife, Samiha.

