



RDAQ 2026

Stockyards & Stethoscopes

MEDICINE IN THE HEART OF QUEENSLAND

MEDIA RELEASE

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A lifetime of dedication to rural medicine has been recognised with Atherton's Dr Tony McLellan awarded one of rural medicine's highest honours - RDAQ Honorary Life Membership - at the annual Rural Doctors Association of Queensland (RDAQ) David Horn Memorial Gala Ball and Awards held Saturday evening in Cairns.

Dr McLellan, a pillar of the Atherton community for more than four decades, was honoured for his extraordinary contribution to rural healthcare, clinical excellence, and the mentorship of generations of rural doctors.

The award was presented on a night celebrating outstanding contributions to rural medicine, bringing to a close the record-breaking RDAQ2026 Conference, which brought more than 500 attendees to the Pullman Cairns International from 25–27 June.

After training at Cairns Base Hospital, Dr McLellan moved to Atherton in 1985 as one of just three doctors supporting the town's 90-bed hospital. He delivered comprehensive care across emergency medicine, obstetrics and inpatient services, helping shape healthcare access in the region at a time of significant need.

Over his career, he has worked across both hospital and private practice, providing broad, high-quality care including obstetrics, anaesthetics and neonatal services. For more than 30 years, he delivered babies for generations of local families, forming deep and lasting connections within the community.

Dr McLellan has also made a profound contribution to rural medical education, mentoring countless students, registrars and junior doctors. His long-running weekly teaching program in Atherton has left a legacy and continues to support the next generation of rural clinicians.

A longstanding advocate for rural medicine, he has contributed to the development of the Rural Generalist pathway and supported RDAQ over many years, including convening the 2019 RDAQ conference.

He is also recognised for his quiet leadership, particularly in times of crisis, including the 2015 Ravenshoe disaster, when he applied his skills and experience to a mass-casualty event that rocked the region and reverberated across the country.

Accepting the award, Dr McLellan acknowledged RDAQ as a 'family', and credited his mentors, colleagues and his wife Michelle for supporting him throughout his career.

"I'm very honoured to receive this award," he said.

"I first encountered RDAQ when they had the conference in Atherton in 1992 and I was immediately struck by the feeling that that this was a family that I wanted to join and to this day it remains a family I want to be part of."

RDAQ President Dr Helen Fraser said the award reflected a career defined by service and impact.

“Honorary Life Membership recognises those who have made an enduring and exceptional contribution to rural medicine, and Tony exemplifies this in every sense,” she said.

“He represents the very best of rural generalism - highly skilled, deeply committed, and generous in sharing his knowledge. His influence extends far beyond his own practice through the many clinicians he has trained and inspired, and it will be felt for generations to come.”

Other awards included the David Horn Medal – RDAQ Honorary Associate Membership – issued to Justine Christerson for her outstanding contribution to supporting rural patients and families.

Ms Christerson founded and leads ‘Breaking Down the Barriers for Rural Patients in Queensland Hospitals’, supporting with practical assistance, advocacy and compassionate support rural families who must travel long distances for care.

Accepting the award, Ms Christerson said that through the support of her generous Facebook followers, she had been able to provide free transport, home-cooked meals, gift cards and a shoulder to lean on for rural patients and families since 2012.

“Without their support and generosity, I would not have been able to do what I have done,” she said.

“And I really would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to every patient and family that I have assisted, for inviting me into their lives and allowing me to be part of the journey.

“I’m so proud to be an Associate Member of RDAQ, and I’m so proud of the work I have achieved. I look forward to next year’s (State) Budget announcement being even better than this year’s Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme budget.”

Dr Fraser said Ms Christerson’s contribution helped fill a critical gap in the healthcare system for rural patients.

“Justine exemplifies compassion in action. She has changed the healthcare experiences of countless rural families and embodies the spirit of this award,” Dr Fraser said.

“From lifelong contributors like Tony to advocates like Justine, the RDAQ Awards showcase the extraordinary commitment, leadership and compassion that exists across rural medicine.”

Awards presented on the night included:

- Honorary Life Membership: Dr Tony McLellan (Atherton)
- Honorary Associate Membership (David Horn Medal): Justine Christerson
- Meritorious Service Award: Dr Tanvir Kapoor (Jandowae)
- Meritorious Service Award: Dr Katie Mills (Toowoomba)
- Outstanding Rural Registrar (Denis Lennox Medal): Dr Matthew Green (Dalby)
- RDAQ Student Prizes
 - Bond University: Bella Harris
 - Griffith University: Lauren Bates
 - James Cook University: Rachael Payne
 - The University of Queensland: Inez Beadell

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