



Tim Escott
NSW Dentist Editor



Improving oral health outcomes one region at a time

Ask anyone in Wagga Wagga and chances are they will know of Dr Mary-Anne Slater. The dentist and CSU lecturer has made a significant contribution to the region and won over final year CSU Dental students with a traditional home-cooked dinner. NSW Dentist Editor Tim Escott caught up with Dr Mary-Anne Slater to hear more about what is happening in the region, including the demand for the public dental system.

If any dentist knows the challenges of the dental profession in a regional area it is Wagga Wagga-based dentist, Dr Mary-Anne Slater.

Having moved to the regional city in 1984, after graduating from Adelaide University she fulfilled a childhood dream to be a dentist. The plan was to stay for a

few years and she has since called Wagga Wagga home with her family (husband Don and now adult children George, Arthur, Henry and Jane).

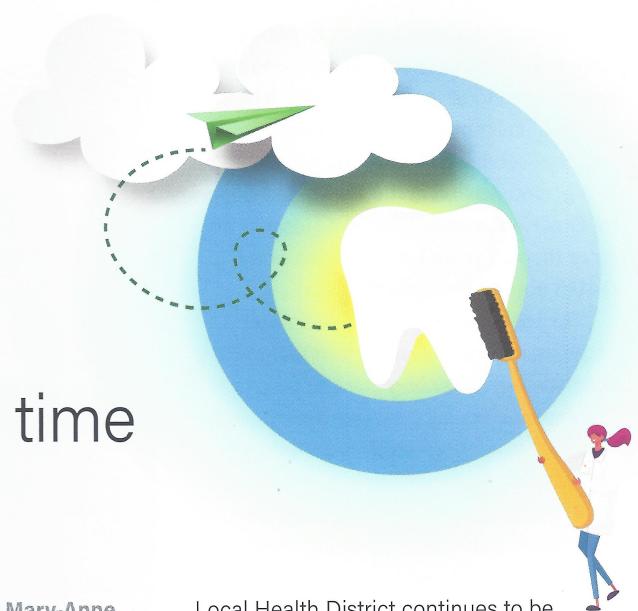
Dr Slater works in her private practice Monday to Thursday. For the last ten years her day off practice on Friday is spent tutoring at CSU Wagga Wagga campus. Although the dental program is located at CSU Orange campus, many final year dental students elect Wagga Wagga campus for their fifth year placement.

Dr Slater is passionate about anything dental and her special interests include preventive dentistry and identifying the high caries risk patient, children's dentistry, treating anxious patients of any age, diagnosis and treatment planning, and implant dentistry.

In what is becoming less common, Dr Slater also welcomes work experience students from high school, TAFE and university to have a glimpse of life in a general dental practice and giving them real first-hand experience.

Demand for the public health system

NSW Health figures show demand for the public health system in the Murrumbidgee



Local Health District continues to be strong (which includes Wagga Wagga).

As at 30 June 2020, there were 454 public dental patients waiting for child assessment and 32 waiting for child treatment with 1,648 waiting for adult assessment and 648 waiting for adult treatment at the corresponding time. For children, the highest reason for oral health hospitalisations in the Murrumbidgee were dental caries and for adults it is development disorders of teeth and dental caries.

Dr Slater knows the pressures placed on the system and has operated on many children through the local private day surgery hospital.

"Despite all our knowledge, children seem to have more holes in their teeth today than when I first graduated over 35 years ago. There is a distinct rise in decay," Dr Slater said.

"You get some patients who say they can't afford private so they have to be on the waitlist for the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital and that waitlist can be a year, or a year and half long."

"The problem with the public system is demand for a specialist, such as an oral surgeon or orthodontist or prosthodontist. As well as the public system meeting the demand for run of the mill treatment, it is even harder for the public system to meet the demand for specialist treatment or treatment under general anaesthetic, which many patients urgently need."