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The Society of Rural Physicians of Canada: Training Rural Family Physicians Not Enough

SHAWVILLE, QUEBEC--(Marketwire - July 18, 2008) - The Society of Rural Physicians of Canada (SRPC) says a recent study showing that no medical residents completing postgraduate training in family medicine at the University of Calgary had definite long-term plans to open a rural practice is a sobering warning for Canada's health care system.

The study, in the recent issue of Canadian Family Physician, examined the career intentions of 17 second-year family medicine residents. The study found 15 planned to practice in an urban setting, while 2 were uncertain of their long-term plans.

"These findings are particularly worrisome given the fact that a major focus of the University of Calgary residency program is to grow rural physicians," said Dr. Karl Stobbe, President of the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada.

To help correct the dire shortage of physicians in rural areas, the SRPC is calling for a Pan-Canadian Rural Health Strategy, with supports not just for physicians but citizens in rural communities.

"Studies show that physicians want to study in rural areas due to the quality of the training," said Dr. Stobbe. "But if most plan to practice in the city, that says that we need to do more to get doctors to practice in regions of greatest need"

The SRPC plan calls for the federal, provincial and territorial governments to work together to ensure every rural Canadian has:

- Access to a well-trained rural family physician;
- Access to emergency and other general hospital services within a reasonable time and distance;
- Access to specialized diagnosis and treatment within an integrated system with outcomes comparable to patients who live in cities.

"We need programs that train doctors who want to meet society's greatest needs, and we need supports in place to ensure they can stay there and care for their patients," said Dr. Stobbe. "Nothing short of a national rural health strategy is capable of doing that."

The SRPC is also calling on the federal government to increase the number of students from rural Canada in medical school, since students with rural roots are more likely to return home to set up practice.

"Studies show more medical students with rural backgrounds choose rural medical practice, while only one in twenty urban based students do so," said Dr. Stobbe. "By creating training programs for those entering rural medicine and interested in surgery, maternity care, anesthesia, endoscopy, cardiac care, geriatric care, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, aboriginal health and others, even more students would be interested in rural medicine."

The Society of Rural Physicians of Canada (SRPC) is the national voice of Canadian rural physicians. Founded in 1992, the SRPC's mission is to provide leadership for rural physicians and to promote sustainable conditions and equitable health care for rural communities. On behalf of its members and the Canadian public, SRPC performs a wide variety of functions, such as developing and advocating health delivery mechanisms, supporting rural doctors and communities in crisis, promoting and delivering rural medical education, encouraging and facilitating research into rural health issues, and fostering communication among rural physicians and other groups with an interest in rural health care. The SRPC is a voluntary professional organization representing over 2,500 of Canada's rural physicians and comprising 5 regional divisions spanning the country.

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