



Society of Rural Physicians of Canada
Société de la médecine rurale du Canada

Media Release

Small Surgical Programs in BC Threatened Again

Golden, BC / August 2, 2002/- “This is really pretty ironic” stated Dr. Trina Larsen Soles, BC Chapter President for the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada. “3 years ago the only doctors in the province being funded for on-call were the ones in small rural communities. Now the Ministry of Health has plans to replace on-call funding for rural surgical programs with a call-back scheme. The plan does pay doctors if they come in to do a surgery, but no longer insures that anyone is in town to provide the service. This is a significant decrease in the level of services our communities have come to expect”. Larsen Soles went on to comment that there are only 12 communities in the province where the OR is run entirely by GPs. There are 7 in the Interior Health Region and 5 in the Northern Health Region.

“The really frustrating thing is that our health region agrees with us. Interior Health has proposed several solutions which would continue some level of on-call funding to these small communities. Their plans were not approved by the Ministry, and Interior Health has appealed this decision. Our understanding of the new doctor’s contract is that the Health Authorities may purchase whichever on-call services they feel are necessary. However our Health Authority is not being allowed to do this”.

There are many ways to eliminate surgical programs. One is to close the program or the hospital. This has already happened in a number of communities. The programs remaining were deemed to provide a critical service. However not funding nurses and doctors to be available to provide these services ultimately will result in them being lost. From there it is a short step to losing obstetrical providers with the result that women lose the ability to give birth in their own communities.

“If on-call funding for anesthesia and surgery are withheld in rural communities, it will be a black mark in the history of healthcare delivery in this province. The people who will really suffer will once again be the unsuspecting patients” stated Dr. Michael Smialowski, GP anaesthetist in Smithers.

“The Society of Rural Physicians of Canada is a strong supporter of special skills for rural GPs. We feel that the only way to provide the level of services that rural communities deserve in obstetrics and surgery is for GPs to do it” said Dr. Larsen Soles. “This method has been historically proven to provide safe, cost-effective care to small rural communities across Canada. BC actually has an innovative program to train rural GPs in enhanced skills. Yet now we face the loss of these programs we have worked so hard to promote. I urge the Ministry to act responsibly and look after these small and vulnerable hospitals”

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