



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

## **Media Release**

### **Rural Doctors Pleased at Rural School, Worried if it is Enough**

DRYDEN / FEB 26, 2001/- A government report recommends three new medical campuses - to combat a predicted critical shortage of doctors. However the Ontario Society of Rural Physicians expresses concern that it is not enough.

In media reports on Friday, the Expert Panel on Health Professional Human Resources has predicted a shortage of 1,337 physicians by 2010 unless immediate action is taken. The panel suggests increasing medical school enrolment in Ontario by 160, and hiring 75 new nurse practitioners yearly.

While the increases are welcomed, the predicted shortfall will at best be half met by the suggested measures. It may be a situation of too little, too late. We will still lag behind medical school enrolment in other jurisdictions such as the US, Alberta and the UK.

Workloads of family doctors in rural Ontario are double that of some metropolitan centres. Already 26% of the rural population has difficulty finding a family doctor, significantly higher than the rates in urban centres. The SRP fears that this can only get worse as more doctors burnout from the steadily increasing workload and leave. With no one to replace them health care for rural Ontarians will deteriorate. Currently, rural Ontarians make up about 15% of the population of the province, but are serviced by only about 5% of the physicians.

Dealing with a problem of adequate numbers and distribution is not easy. The SRP hope that the ministry of health places significant resources into to sustaining and enhancing the existing health care of rural and northern Ontairians while we wait for the results of these needed educational reforms. The SRP is willing to work with the government to try to improve rural health care for the good of the entire province.

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## Backgrounder

### Math: does 480 balance the projected loss of 1,337?

If Ontario medical school enrolment increases by 160 in 2001, half of the MD's will be finished training as family doctors(FP) in July 2007 and the other half as specialists mid 2009 or later. In 2007 an additional 80 FP will enter practice. In 2008 an additional 80 FP. In 2009 an additional 80 FP and 80 Specialists will enter practice and the same in July 2010. Thus the expert panel's plan introduces a total of 480 additional doctors by mid 2010 to cope with a predicted shortage of 1,337

### Existing Shortages

While an accurate number is elusive the government's own Underserved areas program calculates that as of October, 2000, 107 communities - 33 in Northern Ontario and 74 in southern Ontario - were short 456 family physicians, up 9 per cent from a year earlier. In 1999 Dr McKendry in his report estimated that the number is closer to 1,000.

### Rural Ontario has the Most Overworked Doctors

Population per Family Physician 1997-98 (Source CMA and Toronto District Health Council)

Rural Ontario 1,562 Toronto 880

Windsor 1,402 Sault Ste. Marie 864

Sudbury 1,410 Kingston 837

London 902 Ottawa 689

### Rural Patients are Having a Hard Time Accessing Care

Last year 26% of people outside major metropolitan areas had difficulty finding a family doctor. This was 25% higher than the provincial average and is particularly striking when one considers that other alternate sources of primary care such as paediatricians, gynaecologists, and walk in clinics, are even less available in rural areas. (Source OCFP)

### Ontario Trains Few Doctors for the Size of the Population

Nationally medical school graduates peaked in number at 1,835 in the year 1985. Subsequently cutbacks have dwindled the number of medical students graduating to 1,577 in 1997. If the Ontario government increases enrolment by the suggested 160 the ratio in Ontario will only climb to one student for 15,539 population by 2005.

### Population per Medical Student (source ACMC, The Lancet)

Ontario 20,200 Alberta 14,000

Canada 18,000 Australia 13,500

United States 14,700 Britain 12,000

### Ontario has less physicians than other provinces or most developed countries

Physicians per 100,000 Population

Ontario..... 178

Canada..... 186

US..... 230

OECD \*..... 260 \*Organization for Economic Co-operation & Development

### Ontario Medical Schools do not produce large numbers of rural doctors

Only 8% (168) of the 2076 graduates of Ontario medical schools from 1993 to 1998 are in rural practice.  
(Source CAPER)