



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

Media Release

Rural Doctors Say: Ontario Needs More than just a Rural School

DRYDEN / May 17, 2001/ - The Ontario Society of Rural Physicians applauds health minister Clement's vision in forming a new northern and rural medical school. "This plan gives us a light at the end of the tunnel, but we have to get there." says Dr Carl Eisener of Dryden. "Doctors in ten years is good, but we need them now."

The report of the expert panel on health professional human resources was also released today and must be implemented as soon as possible. Other recommended solutions, included a rural streaming of the additional 160 students given to existing medical schools. Canada is 31% rural but under 10% of graduates of the existing Ontario medical schools choose to work in rural areas. Medical education in Ontario needs to be reformed by enrolling students of rural origin and developing a rural curriculum with on site training.

Other recommendations of the expert panel include features to stop the burnout and drain of existing rural doctors. "Proposals such as providing turn key practices, funding for nurse practitioners and support for specialists to provide telemedicine and others need to be developed and funded now" says Eisener.

The rural doctors have written a letter to ask the minister to appoint a stakeholder group of rural doctors and community representatives to oversee implementation of the plan. Provinces such as Manitoba and Alberta have already instituted Rural Physician Action Plans run by stakeholder groups. "It takes rare courage to fund a long range plan that won't see effect until well after his existing mandate. It's something that politicians are unfairly accused of never doing" says SRP exec Dr Carl Eisener "We are asking him to help us solve our own problems while we wait for the results of the educational reforms."

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Backgrounder

Research Findings of Educational Issues Critical to Distributing Physicians

Both Carter (CMAJ 1987 Feb 15;136(4):366-8) and Godwin (CMAJ 1999 April 20;160(8):1159) have found that medical students of rural origin were 2 to 3 fold more likely to practice in rural areas. These results closely parallel studies performed in the United States and Australia that show that a rural admission policy linked with a rural curriculum and rural experience can dramatically increase the number of doctors who choose to practice in underserved areas.

<http://www.cma.ca/cmaj/vol-160/issue-8/1159.htm>

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)

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. With the announced Ontario government increases enrolment of 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 (2000) 20,200 Alberta 14,000
Canada (2000) 18,000 Australia 13,500
United States 14,700 Britain 12,000

How Many Doctors Are Enough

In Ontario there is one GP to 996 population. In rural Ontario each doctor has to look after 1,562 patients, usually without the help of specialists. The Ontario Underserved Areas program is looking for over 400 doctors for over 100 communities.

More Doctors Someday?

It takes an average of 7 years to train a physician for independent practice. Increasing medical student numbers in 2001 only starts increasing the number of practising doctors in 2007. The whole 160 student increase will fully impact in 2010. In the interim nationally 800 physicians retire annually and a further 600 move to the United States.