

Replace me... please?

Peter Hutten-Czapowski,
MD¹

¹Scientific Editor CJRM,
Haileybury, ON, Canada

Correspondence to:
Peter Hutten-Czapowski, phc@
srpc.ca

The venerable generalist rural doctor is asking again to be replaced... please hurry up.

Telemedicine was going to do that. Robots and video from afar. That never really panned out. It certainly has helped and was very useful at the height of the pandemic, but no one is replacing me with a robot. Perhaps, it is the chip shortage.

Nurse practitioners were also going to replace us. In the end, few and far between and mostly in the cities. Certainly a help. Mind you quite small practices, and breadth of practice not enough to share call with.

Then, we heard about the electronic medical record. They said it would make the office so much more efficient that we could zip through the day. Yeah, about that. Certainly, it has made us more organised, and my typing skills have improved immensely. However, at the end of the day, I am seeing fewer people, not more. Perhaps, I missed something in the manual on page 147.

Then, the hope was that allied health providers and teams would make us redundant. Do not get me wrong; having more nurses, counsellors and dietitians has been a boon to the rural population, but it has not seemed to edge any one

doctor out. Sure, we do fewer paps, well-baby visits, psychotherapy and the like, but somehow there is so much new work, and alas, new committees and administration, that we are running as fast as before.

The next new thing is AI. I tried to convince ChatGPT to write this editorial. I had three different 'extra' projects needing to be done around the ins and outs of my daily practice and no time to do any of them. I was desperate and willing to try anything. How hard could it be to be replaced at the keyboard? Five hundred and twenty words about the challenges of rural practice. After a few attempts, with recurrent prompting, it had style, grammar and a beginning, middle and end. However, no matter how I primed it, it seemed to think that rural medicine can be fixed with telemedicine. OK. The artificial brain still needs a bit of work.

So here I am, stuck, a rural generalist with a bit too many things that I do to be easily replaced. Ultimately, it seems that only a rural generalist physician is going to replace a rural generalist physician. Now, all I have to do is wait for the regional medical schools to flood the rural areas with doctors. Any day. Soon. For sure. I think. OK. Perhaps more of a trickle.

I did not want to retire yet anyway.

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