



**NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR  
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

**Doctors raise concerns about shortage of Family Physicians**

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**St. John's, NL** – The challenges facing family physicians in the province were discussed by the NLMA today, as the Association launched its third installment in a series of public information sessions to inform the public about the gaps in the health care system and how physicians are coping with the deficiencies.

Former NLMA President, Dr. Lydia Hatcher led the discussion, which included panelists Dr. Jody Woolfrey from Botwood, Dr. Wendy Graham from Port aux Basques and Dr. Elizabeth Callahan from St. John's.

“As a family doctor, emergency room physician and former rural doctor, I have seen the challenges we all face daily in delivering quality health care to our patients. In a health care system that is underfunded, poorly human resourced, and geographically isolated it is no wonder that we all feel tremendous pressure. It is only because of the extraordinary dedication of the professionals working within it that our health care system works as well as it does. However, in the next five to 10 years, we expect about a quarter of our doctors will retire,” said Dr. Hatcher.

Family practice is widely regarded as being at the heart of the health care system overall. The NLMA estimates that at least 100 additional family physicians are needed to meet the needs of the province's population.

“The shortage of family doctors, coupled with an aging population that has increasing rates of chronic disease, is directly contributing to prolonged wait times and the growing number of patients in the province who do not receive timely access to primary care when they need it. When a medical condition deteriorates because it goes untreated or the treatment is delayed, preventable suffering occurs and ultimately the strain on the medical system worsens,” Dr. Hatcher explained.

Dr. Lydia Hatcher served as NLMA President in 2001. She is a graduate of Memorial University and has practiced family medicine in the province for the past 25 years. She has a private practice in Mount Pearl, a consulting practice in chronic pain and works part time at the Emergency Room of the Janeway. Dr. Jody Woolfrey's practice is located at the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Care Centre in Botwood. He is a graduate of Memorial University and has practiced family medicine in the province for the past 13 years. Dr. Wendy Graham is also a graduate of Memorial University and has practiced family medicine at the Dr. Charles LeGrow Health Care Centre in Port aux Basques for the past 11 years. Dr. Callahan has practiced family medicine at the Midtown Medical Clinic in St. John's for the past 30 years. She is the immediate past-president of the NLMA and currently serves on the NLMA Board of Directors.

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