

Dr. Lydia Hatcher
Primary Care Media Statement
April 15, 2010

Good morning,

Today we are here to discuss the challenges facing family physicians in the province and how these issues are impacting patients.

Our panelists today are Dr. Elizabeth Callahan from St. John's, Dr. Wendy Graham from Port aux Basques and Dr. Jody Woolfrey from Botwood.

My name is Dr. Lydia Hatcher. 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.

The current shortage of family doctors, coupled with our 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.

[FEEL FREE INPUT YOUR OWN WORDS AND SPEAK TO SOME OF THE OVERARCHING ISSUES FACING FAMILY MEDICINE FROM A MORE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE]

In the next five to 10 years, we expect about a quarter of our doctors will retire. If this occurs without a corresponding investment in primary care, we can expect to see even longer wait times and a growing number of orphaned patients with no access to primary medical care.

The NLMA estimates that at least 100 additional family physicians are needed to ensure our patients receive the appropriate level of care that they need and deserve.

I'll turn it over now to Dr. Callahan to discuss the challenges of operating a closed, busy urban practice, followed by Dr. Graham who will be focusing on the management of complex patients in a rural practice. Dr. Woolfrey will then discuss his experiences as a rural practitioner and the constant challenges of physician turnover.

After each panelist has made their statements we will open the floor to questions.