

President's Letter

June 16, 2021

Report on Recruitment and Retention Workshop

Dear Colleagues,

Last week I had the pleasure of attending an NL Physician Recruitment and Retention Workshop hosted by Memorial University's Faculty of Medicine. The purpose of the workshop was to identify the top priorities for improving physician recruitment and retention and to lay the basis for a plan to be presented to the government. The workshop was attended by physicians, medical learners, regional health authorities, the Department of Health, the NLMA, CFPC, Family Practice Networks, and others.

A few things stood out for me from the workshop.

We have been discussing the same problems and solutions for many years, but little progress has been made. Too many of our medical graduates are lost to other provinces. We have the worst record in the country for holding on to our medical graduates. Newfoundland and Labrador is simply not competitive when compared to other provinces and, without change, our physician shortages will not go away any time soon.

The way we pay many groups of physicians is outdated. The fee-for-service model in family medicine does not reflect the way physicians are trained or the type of care they want to provide to patients. Nor does it support a team-based model of practice, which would lead to improved access and higher quality care for patients.

We need a better recruitment strategy to help physicians and their families integrate with their communities. We also need to strengthen medical students' exposure to training opportunities in rural parts of the province so they will be more likely to return to practice there one day.

Our inability to recruit and retain the right number of doctors in our communities has led to high volumes, unsustainable on-call demands and inadequate relief support. The culmination of these issues has made Newfoundland and Labrador an unattractive place to practice medicine.

I was alarmed after learning just how ill-equipped the health care system is to recruit doctors. Our long-standing perceptions were confirmed that the majority of RHA efforts are focused on dealing with urgent locum recruitment needs and "putting out fires" rather than forward-looking recruitment. There are little to no marketing tools available, no provincial recruitment strategy, no physician human resource plan, no social media plan or strategy, and no funding available to attend medical student conferences to recruit new doctors. Other provinces often do a better job reaching out to our own learners than we do ourselves.

The workshop confirmed for me that our key negotiating priorities are on the right track. Our focus has been to fix the fundamental reasons why it is hard to recruit and retain doctors – competitiveness, the right payment models, team-based care, locum availability, the burden of call, physician human resource planning, and fixing inequities in the system.

I was also glad and reassured to learn that other stakeholders have this issue on their agendas as well. I look forward to receiving Memorial's final report on the outcome of the workshop and sharing it with you.

Sincerely,



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