



NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR  
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

## NLMA says Virtual ER Another Symptom of Failure to Address Province's Severe Doctor Shortage

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**St. John's, NL** – The NLMA says that Eastern Health's decision to implement a virtual care hybrid model in Grand Bank's emergency department is another signal the physician shortage is escalating to extreme levels.

“Virtual Care for Emergency Rooms in Grand Bank, as well as three locations in Central Newfoundland, reflects a failure to recruit physicians. Recruitment and retention are the underlying problems that need to be fixed,” said Dr. Susan MacDonald, President of the NLMA.

According to Eastern Health's July 30 news release, emergency room virtual care is a temporary measure “in response to a physician shortage” at the Dr. S. Beckley Health Centre in Grand Bank.

The province is currently experiencing a crisis in health care with overrun emergency departments and severe physician shortages in family medicine – up to 90,000 residents are without a family doctor – and speciality medicine, including in cardiology, dermatology, pediatrics, psychiatry, pathology, neurology, obstetrics, and internal medicine.

“Under the new virtual care Emergency Room model, some patients may need to be transferred to a larger emergency department,” MacDonald said. According to Eastern Health, patients will be transported to the nearest Category A Hospital – the Burin Peninsula Health Care Centre – for further treatment if required.

Virtual care in emergency rooms can be a valuable service if properly planned, but the current situation reflects poor human resource planning. The larger emergency rooms will need extra family physicians to staff the virtual services, often drawing them away from their own patients and practices. This cycle amounts to patching one part of the health system at the expense of another.

“For the last two months the numbers in emergency rooms have skyrocketed and the acuity is high,” MacDonald said. “Every shift leaves physicians exhausted, wondering how long they can keep this up. The patients and the physicians of this province deserve better.”

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