

Health care professionals – *how to keep what you have*

Submitted by Office of Rural & Northern Health



There has been much focus in rural and northern Manitoba around the problems of recruiting enough health care professionals to ensure communities have their needs met. There are a variety of efforts and initiatives to recruit qualified people to fill these positions and provide rural and northern Manitoba with quality health care service. The other part of that effort needs to be strategies and practices on how we retain the people we have worked so hard to recruit; there is a role for communities to play in the retention process.

The ironic thing about being able to entice someone to come and work in your community is that someone else will likely be able to entice them away from your community with an offer that appears to be better. That offer could be more money, more time off (or a combination of the two) and other factors. How can communities retain good people?

Communities that have been able to address this issue are those that recognize that the professional life of a health care professional is one part of who they are. If such professionals are welcomed into the community and provided with opportunities to become part of the community, then the community becomes their home. This makes the decision to leave to pursue other opportunities more difficult because they have developed real connections to the community. Deciding to leave what has become their home is much more difficult than just leaving the place where they work.

Life in rural and northern Manitoba has changed dramatically over the past few decades. In spite of that, communities often make the mistake of expecting the delivery of health services to remain relatively unchanged. Our expectations of what is possible and reasonable for local health care providers to do are sometimes unrealistic. The entire nature of work and the expectations of people regarding the nature of 'work' have changed. There is much greater concern with quality of life. People are more interested in working to live rather than living to work. This change in perspective is also true for health care providers. They have families and interests outside of their professional life

and a professional life that does not allow them to pay attention to those other interests is not sustainable.

Communities may have to change their expectations of how health care services are delivered. That may mean communities in close proximity to one another may have to be more open to sharing services and cooperating on how health care is delivered in their area in order to reduce the demand on resident professionals. It certainly means that communities need to do a better job of respecting personal and private boundaries of health care providers (for example, eliminating the grocery store consults) so the professional's time away from work is truly away from work.

Such small efforts at improving the practice environment for health care professionals in rural and northern areas may well contribute to retaining those individuals in communities. An environment that allows a reasonable balance of work and professional life provides a rewarding professional experience and workplace and is a community that is welcoming. These communities will be more likely to retain their health care

professionals. Communities need to take a critical look at the community and work environment that they are providing and then take steps, in cooperation with their regional health authority, to create sustainable work conditions.

The Office of Rural & Northern Health (ORNH) was organized as part of the Manitoba Rural Physician Action Plan and has been established to provide rural leadership, coordination, facilitation and administration of programs related to education, recruitment and retention of rural health care professionals. The long-term vision of the office is to have a rural & northern health care system staffed by a greater percentage of Manitobans with rural or northern roots and training experiences. This mandate includes working with communities in the development of local plans to recruit and retain local health care professionals.

If you are interested in learning more about the activities of the ORNH, visit our website at www.ornh.mb.ca. You can also call the Dauphin office and ask for ORNH Administrative Director, **Wayne Heide**, at 1-866-244-ORNH (6764). \$

A Goodyear advertisement featuring a yellow construction vehicle with large tires. The text reads: "Goodyear. Supplier to the Association of Manitoba Municipalities". Below this, a list of services is provided: "• Complete line of tires and retreads", "• 24-Hour Commercial Road Service", and "• Over 25 locations, conveniently located throughout Manitoba to serve you." At the bottom, the Goodyear logo is displayed in yellow and red, followed by the contact information "1-800-GOODYEAR • www.goodyear.com".