



The Northern Ontario School of Medicine

The Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) is a joint initiative of Lakehead University in Thunder Bay and Laurentian University in Sudbury that targets students from Northern Ontario and is focused on servicing communities in the region. The NOSM offers a four-year MD program with a unique curriculum and multiple teaching and research sites distributed across Northern Ontario, including large, small, rural, remote and aboriginal communities. The NOSM's mandate is to be socially accountable to the diverse cultures of Northern Ontario.

The NOSM's education and training programs favour students who are likely to thrive in the challenging northern rural learning environment. The program is relatively new with the first intake year in 2005. The program can support 56 students per year, with approximately 90% coming from rural and remote locations in Northern Ontario. The program targets rural, aboriginal and franco-phone applicants to ensure that an accurate reflection of Northern Ontario demographics is achieved.

Each intake class is split into two groups, with Lakehead University taking 24 students and Laurentian University taking 32 students. The MD program focuses on students learning in small groups, with much work being completed at community learning sites supported by broadband communication information technology. The curriculum is clinically driven, while ensuring students gain

a strong grounding in core knowledge and skills including the basic sciences.

The program's first year has students working in small groups of eight for classroom learning. The program is unique in its approach to practical/clinical learning. In year one, students spend two half-days a week completing a rotation in practical settings. In their second year, students complete two clinical rotations in community settings, and in their third year they are required to complete an eight-month placement. Most medical students from other schools only begin clinical rotations in their third year of schooling. However, the NOSM has over 70 community learning sites throughout Northern Ontario in aboriginal, rural, and remote communities, large rural and small urban communities where students can increase their clinical experience throughout their entire degree. The fourth year is dedicated to ongoing clinical training in large hospitals in Thunder Bay and Sudbury.

NOSM's learning approach is patient-centered, focusing on people in their home/family/community context, through case-based learning. This Community Based Medical Education program has students learning not only in larger hospitals but also in other hospitals, health facilities, family practices and various community settings.

Residency Programs are offered throughout Northern Ontario by NOSM in collaboration with McMaster University and the

University of Ottawa. Postgraduate education is available in family medicine and the major general specialties of general internal medicine, general surgery, orthopedics, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, psychiatry and anesthesia. NOSM continues to build on current programs and work towards increasing the number of specialty residency posts and training programs in Northern Ontario. This expansion of postgraduate education will see a steady rise in the numbers of skilled physicians in Northern Ontario, even before there are graduates of the school's undergraduate program.

To continue the learning cycle, NOSM assists with Continuing Education and Professional Development (PD) for physicians in the region through a strong PD calendar. Graduate Studies programs offered by distance education will allow rural physicians to undertake higher university studies and career progression without leaving their towns or practices.

Community participation is seen as an essential part of the school's success. With students distributed across Northern Ontario, communities play a vital role in welcoming and supporting students so they feel part of the community and develop a particular understanding of living and working in a rural setting. Local NOSM Committees work with medical students throughout their clinical rotations to ensure that housing, recreation options and other support mechanisms are in place as required. Each community committee includes relevant stakeholders including municipal personnel who see this as an opportunity for physician recruitment through the demonstration of the quality of life in their community.

The structure of the NOSM program is seen as a positive step to encouraging physician recruitment in Northern Ontario. Similar programs that ran in the area before have seen approximately 60% of graduates remain in the area, and it is anticipated that two-thirds of the first graduating class in 2009 will remain in the region to service the communities that have assisted them throughout their education and training process.

Sources:

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The Northern Ontario School of Medicine website. Available at: <http://www.normed.ca>



Photo courtesy of NOSM