

Improving care in rural and northern Manitoba

New assessment process has international medical grads practicing in the province

Submitted by the Manitoba Department of Health

Regional health authorities across Manitoba, the Physician Resource Coordination Office (PRCO) at Manitoba Health, the University of Manitoba Faculty of Medicine, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba have collaborated on changes to the process for assessing International Medical Graduates (IMGs) seeking medical licensure in primary care. The new process was implemented in the fall of 2006 to assess the suitability of IMGs for rural and northern practice in primary care.

This new process replaces the former CAPE (Clinicians Assessment & Professional Enhancement), a three-day assessment process for IMGs seeking direct licensure. The new assessment is based on the input for suggested improvements from many health stakeholders, including rural community physicians. Some of the feedback from IMGs themselves was that the former abbreviated assessment process was inadequate for assessment.

The changes are also based on best practices, in particular those of the Western Alliance for Assessment of International Physicians (WAIIP).

The new assessment process now in place consists of a pre-employment interview to assess the suitability of the candidate for rural and northern settings, an orientation to health care in Manitoba and a three-day formal assessment process with a written component as well as simulated patient encounters. This is followed by a 12-week clinical placement in a rural or northern centre, including formal orientation and mentorship to ensure a successful transition.

The new process improves upon the old CAPE process by providing the supports necessary to allow applicants to adequately demonstrate their competencies to practice medicine in the rural and northern context while learning about health care in Manitoba. The additional mentorship component

provides a more comprehensive transition to practice in rural and northern areas.

The first pre-employment interviews were conducted in December 2006. Assessment results for the candidates who completed the assessment process are being reviewed and the College of Physicians and Surgeons will be making a determination of their eligibility for licensure in the near future. The second set of interviews was held in March 2007 and candidates are currently undergoing their three-month clinical assessment. The third session of pre-employment interviews are scheduled for August 2007. The target is to have forty practice ready candidates per year through the new assessment process.

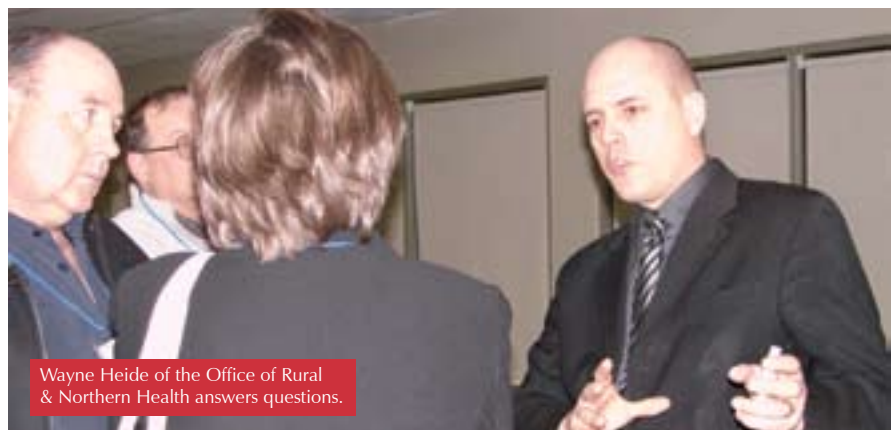
The new assessment process will help ensure a successful placement of IMGs to medical practice in rural and northern Manitoba and will be a key link in improving recruitment, retention and the quality of patient care in the province.

High school students: our future health care professionals

Submitted by Wayne Heide, Administrative Director, Office of Rural & Northern Health (ORNH)

Manitoba's Office of Rural & Northern Health (ORNH) was established to develop and implement long-term strategies that will assist with the recruitment and retention of health care professionals for rural and northern Manitoba.

There is a significant body of research from Canada and other parts of the world that have established a direct correlation between where a health care professional originates and where they will end up practicing their profession, i.e., students who come from rural and northern communities are more likely to end up living and working in rural and northern communities once they have



Wayne Heide of the Office of Rural & Northern Health answers questions.

completed their professional training. The research also tells us that the earlier people are exposed to career options the greater the likelihood they will more seriously consider those options.

As a result of this research, the ORNH is employing as one of its strategies to address recruitment and retention, promoting health care careers to students in high school in rural and northern Manitoba communities. This takes two main forms; participating in larger career fairs and doing classroom presentation in different high schools throughout the province. By getting to these students who are more likely to end up living and working in rural and northern Manitoba with good information about opportunities and supports, the goal is to increase the number of rural and northern students who select careers in health care and ultimately end up practicing in rural and northern Manitoba communities. The ORNH also provides opportunities for students to do some more in-depth career exploration by helping to arrange job shadowing and volunteer opportunities.

Letting students know about career opportunities and training in health care is not enough to ensure that there will be more health care practitioners working in rural and northern Manitoba in the future. Efforts have to be made to keep these students connected to rural and northern Manitoba while they are in professional training. If we convince students that there are good career opportunities in health care and send them away to be trained, typically to a large urban centre, but we do not make an effort to stay connected to them; personally or professionally, we have done little to increase the likelihood that those individuals will return to rural or northern Manitoba to live and work.

Health care training is typically three or more years of post secondary education. The lives of people can change dramatically in that time and connections to their home communities need to be current and relevant to their personal and professional lives. This means that communities, in conjunction with their local and regional health care community have to make an ongoing effort to stay engaged with these students. Summer jobs, student placements and ongoing personal contact are essential parts of this process.

Everyone has a role to play in this process of increasing the pool of people who want to practice in rural and northern Manitoba. Parents and teachers need to foster interest in health care careers and let

resource organizations like the ORNH know who the students from their communities are that are interested in health care careers. The ORNH and health care training programs need to ensure that prospective students have current and accurate information about training opportunities and academic requirements to take that training. Communities and health care employers need to connect and stay connected to the students from their areas that are pursuing health care training and demonstrate that they are wanted and needed as health care professionals.

This is a long-term strategy that is investing in individuals who originate from and have connections to rural and northern Manitoba. When successful, this strategy will provide opportunities for good careers in rural and northern areas for people from those communities and help communities address shortages of health care professionals.

For more information on Manitoba's Office of Rural & Northern Health and its programs and services, visit the ORNH website at www.ornh.mb.ca.

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