

RURAL MANITOBA HEALTH MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Annual report: Program year ending May 2011

The Rural Manitoba Health Mentorship Program is offered by the Office of Rural and Northern Health (ORNH), to enable students to learn about the clinical and non-clinical aspects of the health care system in rural Manitoba.



A program for students, run by students.

The Rural Health Mentorship Program was created to give students an opportunity to gain practical experience in the healthcare field. During a one week placement in rural Manitoba hospitals, prospective medical students have the opportunity to become familiar with the practice of rural medicine. As such, the goals of this program are twofold: to give participants direct exposure to the realities of the medical field, and to expand their understanding of the unique challenges and benefits of rural medical practice.

Initially developed in 2005 by three aspiring medical students - Edward Tan, Sunny Singh and Gordon Li - today's Rural Health Mentorship Program continues its annual operation under the guidance and support of the Office of Rural and Northern Health (ORNH). Both Edward Tan (University of Manitoba,

Faculty of Medicine, 2011) and Wayne Heide (of ORNH) serve as executive directors for the program, while student volunteers are responsible for managing the program coordination and development.

In 2010-2011, ten students from the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg successfully completed an application process, allowing them the opportunity to participate in a week-long rotation at a rural Manitoba hospital. Gaining exposure to surgery, emergency, mental health, dialysis and oncology was just the start for some of these participants – four have since returned to the Rural Health Mentorship Program as volunteer coordinators, to plan this unique rural experience in 2011-2012.

Rural exposure for prospective medical students.

Approximately 330,000 Manitobans live in rural settings, representing 29 per cent of the province's 1.1 million population (1). Despite the number of rural-dwellers, non-urban Canadian populations are served by only 17% of family physicians and 4% of specialists (2).

Over the past decade, rural Manitoba has also experienced a rationalization of services to regional centres (3). This trend has had an impact on the ability of smaller communities to maintain service delivery at a level that provides a diverse local practice. Compounded by the realities of time and distance, many rural communities lack adequate health care services, and struggle to overcome the effects of urbanization and centralization of care. Ongoing and future challenges include the need to support initiatives that effectively address the health and human resource needs of rural populations.

Manitoba's Office of Rural and Northern Health (ORNH) was established in 2002 with a commitment spanning from education to sustainability, to develop and

implement long-term strategies that will assist with the recruitment and retention of health care professionals for rural and northern Manitoba. Research indicates that one of the ways that rural physician retention can be achieved and improved is through the increased frequency and duration of rural exposures during the training of medical students (4).

Longer training in rural areas is associated with significantly greater numbers of residents indicating rural practice as a career choice (5). This same principle applies to students actively considering a career in medicine.

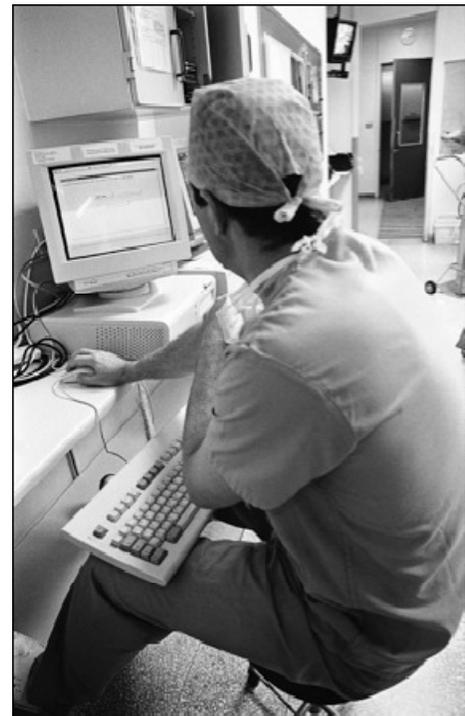
As the need for community-committed and rurally-oriented doctors continues to grow, the Rural Health Mentorship Program and the Manitoba Office of Rural and Northern Health will continue to work together to focus the attention of prospective medical students upon the dynamic and rewarding career possibilities of rural medicine.

References 1. Statistics Canada, 2009. Population Urban and Rural, by Province and Territory. Statistics Canada. Census of Population, 1851 to 2006. 2. Society of Rural Physicians of Canada, 2009. Rural Hospital Service Closures. SRPC: Shawville, QC. 3. University of Manitoba, 2006. Manitoba Medicine: Newsletter of the University of Manitoba Faculty of Medicine and the Manitoba Medical College Foundation. Fall/Winter 2005/2006. 4. Canadian Medical Association, 2000. Rural and Remote Practice Issues. CMA Policy Statements. 5. Society of Rural Physicians of Canada, 2004. Admission of Rural Origin Students to Medical School. SRPC: Shawville, QC.

"I'm from rural Manitoba, and even still I was amazed at the number of different opportunities open to physicians who practice rurally.

During my rotation, I learned that rural medicine is a very diverse field - I was able to observe physicians practicing family medicine, emergency medicine, surgery and radiology. It was exciting to see the number of possibilities in rural practice and it made me even more enthusiastic about exploring it further."

(past RHMP participant)



Rural Medicine up close and personal.

The ten students that participated in the 2011 Rural Health Mentorship Program were selected according to a combination of factors, including volunteer and clinical experience, education, professionalism, and an expressed interest in rural health medicine. In May 2011, each student completed a weeklong rotation at one of three participating rural hospitals: the Gimli Community Health Centre, the Dauphin Regional Health Centre or the Selkirk General Hospital (including the Selkirk Mental Health Centre). Thanks to the support of the Office of Rural and Northern Health, students (who required it) were able to lodge on location for the

week rotation. During 35-45 hours of on-site observation, students shadowed physicians, nurses, paramedics, technicians, and other health care professionals. Opportunities for learning were as diverse as rural health itself. Activities included attending rounds, observing patients, viewing surgeries, regarding staff meetings, and tagging along on emergency ambulance calls. In addition to this first-hand insight into the daily routines and professional lives of rural practitioners, students had opportunities to ask questions and to initiate further exposure into specific areas of interest.



The Rural Health Mentorship Program gives students the chance to get up close and personal with rural health care. Participants attend rounds, observe patients, watch surgeries in the OR, accompany mentors to private clinics, sit in on patient consultations and staff meetings, and even ride along with paramedics on emergency calls.



What students had to say...

Overall, students found the Rural Health Mentorship Program experience to be a positive one. Being up close and personal to a professional field that most students yearn to catch a glimpse of was a big plus!

“The most memorable experience of the week was observing a baby being delivered.”

“My favourite part was when a doctor reset a broken ankle in front of me.”

And while rural medicine is known for its dynamism, for many students, the program provided their first exposure to the many fields of work that fall under the banner of rural practice:

“It was so interesting to follow a doctor starting his day in chemo, working his way to the ER, and finishing off the rest of the day with his clinic patients. They have to know how to do it all.”

Not only did the students “see” rural medicine, many also “saw themselves in it”, an exciting potential for much-needed future health care human resources in this province.

“This program has inspired me to practice rural medicine. The community of people which I encountered makes me want to go back to the same hospital and community when I’m a practicing doctor.”

And for those interested students of the future? The verdict is in: the Rural Health Mentorship Program is a good thing:

“I believe this program is such a great way to expose aspiring medical students to rural health care and how rewarding it can be to practice medicine in a rural community. Nothing can compare to seeing first-hand what rural medicine really entails.”



Manitoba's Office of
Rural and Northern
Health
<http://www.ornh.mn.ca>

RHMP up and coming

For more information about the Rural Health Mentorship Program or to find out more about this year's application deadlines, please visit the RHMP web site:

<http://www.healthmentormb.ca>

Interested students and community representatives are also invited to email RHMP at:

ruralhealthmentor@hotmail.com

In 2011-2012, Manitoba's Rural Health Mentorship Program will enter its seventh year, jointly coordinated by four of last-year's program participants (including Patricija Zot, Kristin Kantautas, Susan Telencoe and Priya Sharma). Together, with the direction and support of the Office of Rural and Northern Health (ORNH), these coordinators are dedicated to the ongoing success and expansion of the program. Attracting new schools and new communities, while building on relationships already-established, is all part of the plan for a great program in 2012. Contact RHMP to find out more!