

Ontario Medical Students' Association Lobby Day Briefing Note 2012

Issue

Medical students make decisions about their careers well in advance of finishing medical school. Often students have chosen a specialty at least a year before graduation. There are a variety of factors that influence the decision of which speciality to choose including available specialty training positions, the geographic location of those positions, hours worked, and other lifestyle considerations.

Although several sources provide components of this information, such as the Ontario Population Needs-Based Physician Simulation Model, HealthForceOntario, the Professional Association of Interns and Residents of Ontario (PAIRO) and the Council of Ontario Faculties of Medicine (COFM), it can be confusing and difficult for medical students to synthesize this information.

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information's *Supply, Distribution and Migration of Canadian Physicians Report, 2010*, the total number of physicians per 100,000 population is 189. This is an improvement from previous years however Ontario ranks only 8th in the country. It is clear that more work needs to be done to increase the number of doctors to meet the demand of Ontario's health care system and to address the coming demographic shift. However, Ontario's medical students want to ensure that any increases to the total number of trainee positions are done so with an associated commitment to increase the necessary system funding and infrastructure in order to meaningfully employ these new graduates in their specialized fields.

Once a medical student has graduated and committed to a specialty training program, it is not particularly simple to change paths. Training programs are between 2 and 6 years duration, with many physicians completing an additional year of fellowship training.

A great deal of concern has arisen in recent years about physicians completing specialty training only to find that they cannot find adequate employment. From 'Canadian surgeons face flat-lining job market,' *The Globe and Mail*, Feb 24th, 2011, "*Having spent about a decade learning and training for a job, an estimated 30 specialists can't find one – and as many as 50 might face the same situation after they graduate in July. While 800 surgeons are already employed across the country, there are three full-time positions and four locums, or temporary jobs, advertised on the Canadian Orthopaedic Association job board.*" From 'Demand high but medical specialists not finding work in Canada,' *The National Post*, Sept 19, 2011 "*We don't know as a nation or a province or a jurisdiction what kind of physician population ... we actually need going forward,*" said Dr. John Haggie, President of the Canadian Medical Association.. "*As a result, people often take a fairly opportunistic, almost random career path, and end up with skills that are fairly focused and difficult to accommodate where they want to be.*"

The Ontario government currently invests between \$110,673 and \$552,544 in an individual physician's residency training (Source: CaRMS, April 14, 2011). This is a significant amount of money to invest in an individual who may potentially be unemployed or underemployed after finishing residency training due to a lack of positions in their chosen specialty. One reason for the lack of positions is a combination of

an aging physician population without pensions and a global economic recession – with economists stating that the average physician-held portfolio shrunk by approximately 30% during 2008-09. In an effort to ensure that physicians have the opportunity to work and treat patients in Ontario, the Ontario Medical Students' Association would like to see all resources that provide critical information about the future of health human resources utilization and planning be presented as one source, in one place so that students are empowered to make informed decisions about areas of specialty training.

Objectives

- Provide medical students with critical information that will empower them to make informed decisions about areas of specialty training;
- Ensure the distribution of residency and staff physician positions appropriately reflects population and provincial need.

Summary of Ask

The Ontario Medical Students' Association respectfully requests that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care collate all critical information about the future of health human resources planning and utilization into one source to be made available in one place so that medical students are empowered to make informed decisions about which areas of specialty training they would like to pursue.

Key Messages

- Medical students choose between specialties before graduating.
- Some factors involved in their decisions are available specialty training positions, geographic location of those positions, hours worked, and other lifestyle considerations.
- What is lacking is some basic information that would empower students to make informed decisions.
- Providing students with job market information, geographic need and predicted shortages will ensure that medical students become doctors who fill the needs of Ontario's health care system.

Quick Facts/Backgrounder

- Medical students currently can choose from 63 fields of study in 14 geographic areas in the province
- Drummond Report "Public Services for Ontarians: A Path to Sustainability and Excellence" Recommendation 5-87: Do a better job of flagging health professions and location that are currently in short supply or where shortages can be expected in the future
- Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Action Plan theme 'the right care, at the right time, in the right place'
- Blog: Choosing Blindly: Residency Selection without a National Physician Selection Strategy