

CRISIS of FAMILY MEDICINE PHYSICIANS: THE RVH CHALLENGES

Fact Sheet

The lack of family physicians in Canada has reached a crisis level, and Ontario's situation is becoming dire. In an article written by Dr. Andrew Park, OMA (Ontario Medical Association) President, and published on November 10, 2023, "You Deserve to see a Doctor," he states:

"2.3 million Ontarians do not have a family doctor and that number is expected to double in only two years. That's one in three Ontarians who won't have access to health care when and where they need it."

In the article, Dr. Park identifies the solution as being more Family Health Teams (FHTs) funded by the government. To bring this message close to home, Renfrew is the only physician group scenario in Renfrew County that is not an FHT or a Community Health Centre (CHC), which compounds our recruitment difficulties.

Challenges to recruitment in Renfrew

1. The group of physicians in Renfrew is currently a Family Health Organization (FHO), so has no support from allied health professionals.
2. Because they are not part of an FHT or CHC, physicians in Renfrew are required to undertake all administrative costs and must incorporate as a business. This is a major roadblock for newly graduated physicians who are novice at the business aspects of a practice, and prefer to join an FHT.
3. The Renfrew & Area Health Services Village (RAHSV), a not-for-profit

organization comprised of municipal leaders from surrounding communities that funded incentive packages for newly signed physicians, achieved its original mandate and commitment. We thank RAHSV for its great work over the years. The completion of their work presents a setback in recruitment efforts, since our competitors continue to offer incentives.

This also means we no longer have support from our catchment area municipalities with the financial burden of physician recruitment.

Independent of the need for family physicians, RVH has ongoing needs for surgeons, nephrologists, hospitalists, and physicians to support our Emergency Department.

4. Renfrew has a Rurality Index for Ontario (RIO) score of 39 (benchmark for eligibility is 40), which results in Renfrew NOT being eligible for the Northern Rural Recruitment Retention (NRRR) government grants for new physicians. This means that new physicians considering the Ottawa Valley to settle are eligible for a government grant if they choose to reside in other areas of Renfrew County further removed from the next tertiary centre, which is Ottawa.

As an example, if a physician moves to the following communities, they are eligible for a provincial grant paid over four years in the amounts of:

Algonquin Highland	\$113,000
Chapleau	\$115,000
Pembroke	\$ 84,760
Renfrew	0

Even though RVH is designated 'small and rural,' our Town of Renfrew is not eligible for any provincial funding to assist with physician funding. We are left on our own to find a solution.

Other factors to consider

- Primary care has changed significantly over the past few years with the single practice family physician no longer desirable by new physicians.
- Large patient rosters are no longer the norm. A retiring solo practitioner may have upwards of 2,500 patients while newer physicians typically roster 1,000-1,300. This contributes to an increase in the number of orphan patients in our area.
- It is hard to determine the exact number of orphan patients in our catchment area, as not all are registered with Health Care Connect. Our best estimate is upwards of 8,500 which will continue to increase with the pending retirement of physicians in our catchment area.
- We have an immediate need for at least five family physicians to roster patients, but ideally eight would address the current concerns and support our hospital programs.
- There is a Canada-wide need to expand recruitment efforts to include the US, UK, Ireland and the Netherlands, and provide opportunities for international physicians to come here to practice, which a) often requires some level of supervision, b) requires Physician Recruiters to be

knowledgeable and connected not only to Ontario and Canadian medical training institutions, but also to be educated, transparent and connected to medical institutions and physician match organizations in other countries.

Physician recruitment will continue to be a major requirement province- and country-wide. Support and financial incentives are NECESSARY in order to be relevant, competitive and successful in recruiting new physicians to Renfrew and area.

The lack of a viable and attractive incentive package to offer new physicians to assist with relocating, setting up their business and helping to cover extremely high tuition costs puts us at a huge disadvantage.

Immediate solutions are needed, as recruitment cannot be paused. It is in this context that RVH and RH have provided meaningful solutions.

One only has to look at the number of Emergency Department closures as an example of the importance of maintaining an innovative, robust human resources strategy.

Faced with this reality, RH has attempted to fill the void by providing incentive funding and clinical space.

With that support, we are fortunate to have recently attracted several new physicians to our hospital and catchment area.

An average of 1,801 patients per year who visited the RVH Emergency Department over the last five years have had no Family Physician.