
Recruitment and retention of rural physicians in Manitoba, Canada



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Program Stream: Management

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Practicum Organization: Office of Rural and Northern Health; Drafted a report to advocate for changes to data collection efforts at the ORNH to ultimately improve workforce planning

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Recruitment and retention of rural and remote healthcare workers is a topic of concern for almost all countries. As such, the World Health Organization (WHO) developed guidelines in 2010 to help countries plan their rural workforce by implementing various strategies to improve recruitment and retention of rural healthcare workers.¹ These guidelines are meant to guide workforce-planning stakeholders around the globe.

In Manitoba, Canada, various strategies and initiatives have been implemented over the last decade to improve the chronic shortage of rural and northern physicians. Despite these efforts, the shortage is an ongoing crisis.² Family physicians are difficult to come by and emergency rooms are struggling to remain open.² For these reasons, understanding how to better plan the rural healthcare workforce in Manitoba is an important topic. Despite the engagement of many stakeholders (Government of Manitoba, Rural Regional Health Authorities, the Office of Rural and Northern Health, the University of Manitoba, and rural communities), increasing the number of physicians available for rural communities has been a constant struggle.

Therefore, looking at the current strategies in place in Manitoba and comparing them to the proven strategies set forth by the WHO and recent literature allowed a theoretical approach to what changes should be made to improve recruitment and retention rates. However, throughout the research, it has been found that many of the recommended strategies in the literature were implemented, but have failed in the unique Manitoba context. With a vast land mass and smaller population size, oftentimes strategies are too costly or require a great deal of resources to be realized. In addition, the impact of certain strategies is not well researched globally.

For this reason, the Office of Rural and Northern Health in Manitoba is looking to expand their data collection efforts to build a longitudinal profile for students, from undergraduate admissions until eventual employment. This initiative is unique and will help with rural workforce planning and an improved understanding of the impact of such strategies, as well as being used to understand how students choose specialties and the overall retention rates of University of Manitoba graduates. This database will inform workforce-planning efforts and eventually lead to better healthcare for all.

Global Health Relevancy

This research focusing on improving physician access to underserved rural and remote populations, which will ultimately lead to better health for these populations. In doing so, this topic promotes the right to health as outlined by the WHO and contributes to achieving global health equity.