

NEWS RELEASE

Symposium sets direction for northern medical training

(Grande Prairie – December 12, 2007) - In the north, for the north! That was the principle theme that emerged at a Medical Education Training Symposium held in Grande Prairie, December 10. The Symposium brought northern stakeholders together and set a foundation for ongoing collaboration towards the development of a medical education model that serves northern Alberta's needs.

Over one hundred delegates, from communities throughout northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories attended. Delegates confirmed the need and desire for solutions that lead to a stable medical workforce for the north, and provided key input to set founding principles to guide that work going forward.

"Our delegates brought a lot of energy, enthusiasm, passion, and commitment to address the issue," said Symposium facilitator Audrey DeWit, a Senior Northern Development Officer with the Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC).

"There is a serious shortage of physicians in northern Alberta and it has a real everyday impact on the care people receive in our communities," said Peace Country Health (PCH) Board of Governors Chair Marvin Moore.

Peace Country Health is currently recruiting 26 family physicians, but would need 47 more to be on par with provincial per capita physician ratios. The number of new physicians expected to be needed in the Region will increase to over 150 in the next 10 years.

In the last four years PCH has recruited 38 physicians to work in the Region. Only 12 of those 38 physicians were trained in Canada.

"That is why we are so concerned and that is why we are here. We need to do more to increase training capacity for medical students - and we need to do it in the north if we want to keep physicians working in the north," said Marvin.

The Symposium was the work of a partnership between Peace Country Health, Grande Prairie Regional College (GPRC), Northern Alberta Development Council, the Grande Prairie and District Chamber of Commerce and the Peace Region Economic Development Alliance (PREDA).

Guest speakers Dr. Roger Strasser, Founding Dean, Northern Ontario School of Medicine, and Dr. David Snadden, Vice Provost Medicine, University of Northern British Columbia, provided insights on the recent development of northern medical training programs in those provinces.

Delegates identified components of medical educational models that would best meet the needs of the north, and generated a set of principles to guide the delivery of medical education intended to train physicians to practice in the north.

“Some strong key directions and principles emerged from that work,” said Audrey. “Delegates want to expand on the capacity of existing programs, and through collaboration create a new medical education model – one that targets northern students and meets northern needs.”

Delegates also expressed a commitment to a strong regional partnership and continued efforts to work together.

Symposium delegates included a number of physicians from PCH and the province, representatives from northern municipal councils and districts, Community Health Councils, post-secondary institutions, First Nations and Metis Settlements, Chambers of Commerce and industry. Dean’s from Alberta’s medical schools, and representatives from the Alberta Medical Association and the Rural Physician Action Plan also participated in the Symposium.

A summary of the input provided and a report on the Symposium directions and next steps will be shared with all stakeholders in the New Year.

In addition to Dr. Strasser and Dr. Snadden, Symposium guest speakers included:

- Dr. Richard Martin, Family Physician, Grande Prairie
- Sean Chilton, PCH Vice-President, Medical and Legal Services
- Dr. Jill Konkin, Associate Dean, Rural and Regional Health, Faculty of Medicine, University of Alberta
- Dr. Doug Myhre Associate Dean, Regional Affairs, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Calgary
- David Kay, Executive Director, Rural Physician Action Plan

Symposium delegate’s information and available speakers presentations can be found on the PCH website at www.pchr.ca

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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Partner Statements

Grande Prairie Regional College

Grande Prairie Regional College is pleased to work with Peace Country Health and help in whatever possible to alleviate the shortage of medical professionals.

Fletcher Bootle, Chair

GPRC Board of Governors

Peace Region Economic Development Alliance

Peace Region Economic Development Alliance is interested and committed to participating in the next phase of moving these ideas forward: that being, helping in development of the business case, strategy development and initiatives.

Ray Skrepnek, Chair

PREDA Workforce Development Committee

Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce

The Grande Prairie and District Chamber of Commerce is very committed to being an active partner in a collaborative solution that addresses the shortage of medical personnel in our northwestern region. We look forward to participating in the next steps as we embark on identifying a medical education model best suited to our needs here in the north.

Tab Pollock, Chair

Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce