




What influences family physicians to select rural practice locations?

It has been well documented that rural areas across Canada suffer from the uneven distribution of physician services. In 2006, more than 19% of Canadians lived in rural communities with populations of fewer than 10000 inhabitants.¹ In 2007, only 13.5% of FPs and 3.0% of other specialists who completed the National Physician Survey (NPS) indicated that they served a rural or a geographically isolated or remote patient population. Of those who completed the NPS, 14.9% of current family medicine residents and 1.8% of other specialty residents indicated that in the coming years they intend to care for patients in rural or geographically isolated or remote communities.

Results from the 2007 NPS allow us to examine what leads to the disproportionate physician distribution between rural and urban communities (Figure 1) and to look for ways in which practice in rural areas can be encouraged.

Easterbrook et al propose that in order to expose medical students to the practice of family medicine in rural areas during their studies and improve the likelihood that they will select a rural community as their

practice location, medical schools need to expand by creating rural branches or programs.² The Northern Ontario School of Medicine and the Northern Medical Program offered by University of British Columbia are recently established Canadian institutions that provide medical students with the opportunity for such exposure.

The NPS is a collaborative project of the College of Family Physicians of Canada, the Canadian Medical Association, and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Additional results are available at www.nationalphysiciansurvey.ca. If you would like the opportunity to develop and write a future Fast Fact using the NPS results, please contact **Sarah Scott**, National Physician Survey and Janus Project Coordinator, at 800 387-6197, extension 289, or sks@cfpc.ca. 

References

1. Bollman RD, Clemenson A. Structure and change in Canada's rural demography: an update to 2006. *Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin* 2008;7(7):9-18. Available from: http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection_2008/statcan/21-006-X/21-006-XIE2007007.pdf. Accessed 2008 Dec 5.
2. Easterbrook M, Godwin M, Wilson R, Hodgetts G, Brown G, Pong R, et al. Rural background and clinical rotations during medical training: effect on practice location. *CMAJ* 1999;160(8):1159-63.

Figure 1. Percentage of FPs who selected practice locations for various reasons: Family physicians serving urban or suburban populations vs FPs serving rural populations.

