

Factors influencing choice to practise in rural and remote communities throughout a physician's life cycle

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Abstract

Introduction: Although a large portion of the Canadian population lives in rural areas, there remains a deficit in the number of family physicians serving these populations. This deficiency results in underserved communities where some patients are without access to a family physician. This qualitative research explored the factors that influence a family physician's decision to work in rural and remote communities in order to identify strategies that may aid in the recruitment and retention of rural family physicians.

Methods: Qualitative study using a participatory research approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Canadian rural physicians to identify influential factors and subsequent thematic analysis was performed.

Results: We found that a wide scope of practice and rural training exposure were important factors in encouraging physicians to practise in rural and remote areas. The biggest challenges were issues relating to family and spousal support, ability to attend continuing professional educational opportunities, and ability to connect with specialists and tertiary care centres.

Conclusion: Effective strategies are required to initiate an upward trend in family physician recruitment in rural communities. Our results provide a number of avenues for addressing low recruitment and retention rates of family physicians in rural and remote communities, including but not limited to, providing opportunities for professional development and having a supportive work environment.

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