
SUMMARY

Dec. 2010

REVIEW OF RURAL RETENTION PROGRAMS

The Ministry of Health Services manages a suite of nine programs to enhance the availability of physician services in rural British Columbia. These programs encourage and support physicians to reside in rural communities as well as to make it possible for many communities to receive services on an outreach basis.

- Five of the rural programs specifically target financial benefits, including: fee premiums, isolation allowances, travel assistance, recruitment incentives, and funds to assist communities with recruiting expenses.
- The four remaining rural programs impact both financial and non-financial factors, and focus on: funding for medical education, a Rural Education Action Plan, a rural locum program and a rural specialist locum program.

In 2002, the Joint Standing Committee on Rural Issues was established to advise government on matters pertaining to rural medical practice.

A review of the effectiveness of rural programs was put forward as part of the Internal Audit and Advisory Services audit plan. Concurrently, the Joint Standing Committee engaged the services of a consultant, Harbour Peaks Management Inc. (Harbour Peaks) to assess the effectiveness of rural programs. Completed in March 2008, the Harbour Peaks report “British Columbia Rural Physician Programs Review” was well received by the Joint Standing Committee.

Given the coordinated effort already undertaken by the Joint Standing Committee, Internal Audit and Advisory Services focused their attention on the Harbour Peaks report, assessing the findings and recommendations, and providing a status report on the actions planned and taken by the Joint Standing Committee.

Overall, rural programs have been successful in supporting physicians to reside in rural communities. While non-financial factors are now the strongest determinants of recruitment and retention, financial incentives still play a role. Additional work to address the staffing of specialists, continuing education and increasing the number of rural-based students remains to be undertaken. The Harbour Peaks report identified opportunities to further improve the effectiveness of the rural programs, and in consultation with stakeholders, developed and provided 90 recommendations to the Joint Standing Committee for consideration in future planning.

A strategy to assess, prioritize, and implement key recommendations was to be developed; the Joint Standing Committee established a one year timeframe to complete this process (March 2009). As part of evaluating the recommendations, the Joint Standing Committee is considering feasibility and implementation options to ensure limited resources are assigned where they can provide maximum benefit.

In December 2009, the ministry provided a prioritized status report action plan that addresses the Harbour Peaks report’s recommendations.

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