

Rural Saskatchewan Doctor Retention and Recruitment Strategy

The annual turnover rate of physicians in rural areas is 18%, compared to 11% in Saskatoon and Regina. In our region, the community of Wakaw went from four doctors in the spring of 2010 to having no full time doctors in the spring of 2011. In order to address this issue Mayor of Wakaw, Ed Kidd discussed challenges facing rural communities at the recent SUMA convention – inviting municipalities to attend a discussion on physician recruitment, retention and incentives packages. The nature of the meeting was to development an agreement among municipalities of a standard incentive package – avoiding direct competition of communities for physician services.

We were pleased to accept the Town of Wakaw's invitation to facilitate this important meeting that included representatives from 16 urban and rural municipalities.

Physicians play a vital role in health care. Working along side with other health care professionals they diagnose illness, prescribe medication and treatments, and carry out procedures that improve the quality of life of residents throughout the Province. During the past five years, the supply of physicians has grown by more than 12% however one of the challenges remains retaining doctors in rural Saskatchewan. This means a shortage of physicians is a significant concern throughout rural Saskatchewan, and creates a number of challenges. Patients in rural areas may not have access to services of a family physician. Workload in single doctor practice may be too heavy impacting their family life, and can lead to professional burnout.

Meanwhile organizations, communities, physicians and health regions continue to develop strategies to ensure medical services are available to their residents. Quite often individual communities remain tasked with recruitment of doctors to their communities with multiple communities bidding against each other to retain the services of a physician. Subsequently incentive packages vary substantially and are quite often the deciding factor when a doctor selects a community to establish a practice.

The meeting generated immense solid dialogue throughout the afternoon with all communities coming to a consensus of what a standard incentive package should look like. In addition a great deal of discussion followed on recruiting and retention of physicians – first examining the challenges – then searching for solutions.

The results from this meeting were forwarded to Minister McMorris.

It was our pleasure to assist the Town of Wakaw with this critical issue and we look forward to working with your community, regardless of the issue you're facing. Our expertise is in project management, proposal and/or business plan development, group facilitation, identifying funding sources, developing bylaws and governance issues, strategic planning, community engagement and opportunity identification. We'll do some background work on the issue, help you identify strategies to move forward and support your volunteers and community in the best way we know how. Call us.