Rural medicine...a breath of fresh air

PAP is proud to announce that the first cohort of 16 Residents in the new Alberta Rural Family Medicine Network (ARFMN) program are on schedule to graduate in June 2003. “These students were incredibly daring to jump into a completely unknown program with just the assurances of people like me and my counterpart, Dr. Doug Myhre, Rural Alberta South Unit Director,” says Dr. Hugh Hindle, Rural Alberta North Director. The ARFMN offers hands-on Family Medicine residency training to prepare competent physicians for the broad demands of rural practice. It is a unique collaborative venture of the RPAP, the Family Medicine departments of the Universities of Alberta and Calgary, Alberta’s rural physicians and rural regional health authorities.

The two-year Family Medicine curriculum provides training in community and hospital practices within rural Alberta, and the curriculum is taught largely by rural-based family physicians and specialists attached to the Family Medicine and Royal College specialty departments of the Universities of Alberta and Calgary. The second class of 19 residents began the program in July 2002.

Should you wish to contact the new grads regarding practice opportunities, please contact the Rural Alberta North office at 1-866-444-6353 and Rural Alberta South office at 1-866-382-1666.
The Alberta Government recently announced that it will consolidate Alberta’s 17 health regions into nine larger ones by April 2003. RPAP will be examining the implications of this change as it affects access to rural health care and RPAP programs in the coming weeks.

The RPAP is continuing its multi-year evaluation cycle by funding an evaluation of the Rural Locum Program which will be conducted with the Rural Locum Program Steering Committee. One of the original initiatives of the RPAP was the introduction of a “short-term” rural locum service to rural physicians practising in communities with four or fewer physicians for short periods of time. The “short-term” locum service started January 1992, a year after the RPAP, and was expanded beginning in January 1996 to include weekend emergency department coverage on a cost-recovery basis. The RPAP agreed to fund this component beginning April 1996. Then again, in September 1999, the RPAP approved a senior’s enhancement to the weekend locum program so that physicians 54 years of age can reduce weekend emergency department coverage. The RLP evaluation steering committee plans to have its inaugural meeting before Christmas.

RPAP welcomes this report and any others that help focus attention on the challenges and opportunities that exist in rural health care, and the acknowledgement that the demand for health care providers must embrace both a recruitment and a retention focus. This is something RPAP has been doing for some time.

The commission’s final report details 47 recommendations related to these overarching themes. First, that strong leadership and improved governance is needed to keep Medicare a national asset. Second, that the system needs to be more responsible, efficient and accountable to Canadians. And third, that strategic investments need to address priority concerns.

With respect to this last point, the Commission recommended creation of five new targeted funds, one of which is $1.5B over two years to improve timely access to care in rural and remote areas.

First, that strong leadership and improved governance is needed to keep Medicare a national asset. Second, that the system needs to be more responsible, efficient and accountable to Canadians. And third, that strategic investments need to address priority concerns.

With respect to this last point, the Commission recommended creation of five new targeted funds, one of which is $1.5B over two years to improve timely access to care in rural and remote areas.

Harvey and Gail Bablitz agree. “Family time has always been the most important aspect of our lives and it has paid off. Summer vacation was always at least four weeks long.” Although the kids are getting older, the family still tries to get together at this time.

The Bablitz family has lived in Whitecourt for 25 years. They have three children: Amy in her fourth year of Geology at the University of Alberta, Cara in grade 12 and Craig in grade 10. All are active in school and sports.

Always active in the community, Harvey was voted 2001 Whitecourt Citizen of the Year. At present Harvey is attempting to decrease his workload, but is finding it a challenge to slow down in rural Alberta. His future goals include “becoming a basketball star in the NBA, golfing more and trying to find a cure for sleep deprivation!”

Gail has a nursing background and presently works as a Health Promotion Coordinator in Whitecourt, where she is involved in the F.A.R.T.Y. program, injury prevention programs and various other initiatives related to health. She also serves as chairperson for the Rural Physician Spousal Network Advisory Committee, which is under the RPAP umbrella. Always actively involved in the community and schools, her goal this coming year is “to plan Amy’s wedding and university graduation and Cara’s high school grad while attempting to keep up with everything else.”

Before the new ARFMN program was even launched two years ago, Tom Peebles (R2) and his wife followed its development online. And while there was some anxiety about the structure, because there were lots of unanswered questions initially, he can now say that he has no regrets and that the program has proved to be an excellent experience. “Moving around to different placements was difficult but we feel it was all worth it in the end because of the great friends we made,” says Peebles. “I was surprised and disappointed that some of the rural communities did not want to be part of the program. I am not sure why, but they are certainly going to have difficulty recruiting new grads if they don’t invite residents out during their training.”

Tom, Jodie and one year old baby Brooke plan to make Grande Prairie a home base for the year following his graduation while Tom does rural locums. “The Rural Locum Program gives me the opportunity to work as little or as much as I want,” says Peebles, “which is a comforting feeling for my wife and young family.”

Harvey and Gail Bablitz agree. “Family time has always been the most important aspect of our lives and it has paid off. Summer vacation was always at least four weeks long.” Although the kids are getting older, the family still tries to get together at this time.

The Bablitz family has lived in Whitecourt for 25 years. They have three children: Amy in her fourth year of Geology at the University of Alberta, Cara in grade 12 and Craig in grade 10. All are active in school and sports.

Always active in the community, Harvey was voted 2001 Whitecourt Citizen of the Year. At present Harvey is attempting to decrease his workload, but is finding it a challenge to slow down in rural Alberta. His future goals include “becoming a basketball star in the NBA, golfing more and trying to find a cure for sleep deprivation!”

Gail has a nursing background and presently works as a Health Promotion Coordinator in Whitecourt, where she is involved in the F.A.R.T.Y. program, injury prevention programs and various other initiatives related to health. She also serves as chairperson for the Rural Physician Spousal Network Advisory Committee, which is under the RPAP umbrella. Always actively involved in the community and schools, her goal this coming year is “to plan Amy’s wedding and university graduation and Cara’s high school grad while attempting to keep up with everything else.”

Before the new ARFMN program was even launched two years ago, Tom Peebles (R2) and his wife followed its development online. And while there was some anxiety about the structure, because there were lots of unanswered questions initially, he can now say that he has no regrets and that the program has proved to be an excellent experience. “Moving around to different placements was difficult but we feel it was all worth it in the end because of the great friends we made,” says Peebles. “I was surprised and disappointed that some of the rural communities did not want to be part of the program. I am not sure why, but they are certainly going to have difficulty recruiting new grads if they don’t invite residents out during their training.”

Tom, Jodie and one year old baby Brooke plan to make Grande Prairie a home base for the year following his graduation while Tom does rural locums. “The Rural Locum Program gives me the opportunity to work as little or as much as I want,” says Peebles, “which is a comforting feeling for my wife and young family.”

Before the new ARFMN program was even launched two years ago, Tom Peebles (R2) and his wife followed its development online. And while there was some anxiety about the structure, because there were lots of unanswered questions initially, he can now say that he has no regrets and that the program has proved to be an excellent experience. “Moving around to different placements was difficult but we feel it was all worth it in the end because of the great friends we made,” says Peebles. “I was surprised and disappointed that some of the rural communities did not want to be part of the program. I am not sure why, but they are certainly going to have difficulty recruiting new grads if they don’t invite residents out during their training.”

Tom, Jodie and one year old baby Brooke plan to make Grande Prairie a home base for the year following his graduation while Tom does rural locums. “The Rural Locum Program gives me the opportunity to work as little or as much as I want,” says Peebles, “which is a comforting feeling for my wife and young family.”
**New RPAP Programs Launched**

The RPAP has introduced two new initiatives: the Student Summer Elective Support Program, and a Community Development and Partnership Grant Program. Full details are available on the RPAP website.

The purpose of the Student Summer Elective Support Program is to provide matching grants of $2,500 to RHAs to foster the hiring of a medical student who has completed their first or second year, and to do so, further expose early careerists to rural medical practice. The matching grants are intended to provide funding for a 4-12 week summer clinical and research experience for up to eight medical students. Priority will be given to medical students of the Universities of Alberta and Calgary who demonstrate an orientation to rural medical practice.

The purposes of the Community Development and Partnership Grant Program are to foster the development of:
- Community/regional health authority/local physician relationships,
- A comprehensive community/RHA recruitment and retention plan, and
- Materials required as part of the plan, such as pamphlets/information sheets/CDs.

**Tips for Living with On-Call**

Fourteen physicians and spouses from among the lines in Alberta to hear preliminary results of the Alberta On-Call Study, partly sponsored by RPAP, at a Rural Physician Spousal Network Take Time Out November weekend in Calgary. A video brought the humorous and not-so-funny realities of on-call to life. Study results, presented by chief investigator Dr. Ron Gachos of High River, showed the significant impact on call has on physicians, spouses and children.

The group brainstormed coping ideas for couples which included:
- Take time for planning,
- Schedule trips away (at least every three months),
- Organize some weekends away, and
- Plan a holiday away just for the physician.

For more information contact RPAP (403) 283-1400.

**Upcoming Event**

Reach New Heights Spousal Retreat

Friday-Sunday, 7-9 March 2003
Kananaskis Delta Lodge.

Discussions, watercolor painting, naturalist activities, free R and R time. Joint with PSAP. For more information contact RPAP (403) 283-1400.

**Community groups are contributing to health care throughout the north.** In Fairview, the Municipal District and Town are building a new medical clinic next to the hospital. The local Foundation is also contributing to facilities for medical services. In Beaverlodge/Hythe, the active Hospital Foundation funds advanced cardiac life support (ACLS) training for physicians, as well as training and equipment for other health care professionals.

Grimshaw physicians and community members have banded together to protect the Peace Regional Health Authority’s proposal to close the hospital. In Beaverlodge, there is hope that a new hospital will one day be built.

Many RHAs and physicians participated in the RPAP-sponsored Recruitment Fair at the U of A this fall. Displays, videos, photographs – and a chance to talk one-on-one with experienced people – attracted students to the booths. Among the many innovative materials was a “School Exercise Book” developed by a medical student to describe his experience at Mistahia Health Region. Recruitment efforts are paying off in many areas. Peace River is hopeful about a project towards prevention of renal disease. Individuals in the community will receive education on diabetes, blood pressure, nutrition and exercise for example. Milk River is one of eight rural sites for this program.

**Spousal Network**

**LEAH LECHELT**
(780) 432-2829
RPAP-Consultant@rpap.ab.ca

A week-long northern trip this fall included visits with medical staff, some spouses and community representatives in three health regions:
- Mistahia (Beaverlodge, Grande Prairie, Valleyview, Spirit River, Fairview),
- Peace (Grainmav, Peace River) and
- Northwestern (Fort Vermilion, High Level).

Other visits were made to Stettler, Lac La Biche and Bonnyville.

Increased computerization of offices is underway in the North. High Level and Peace River are among physician groups participating in the Physician Office Support Program (POSP) of the Alberta Medical Association and Alberta Health and Wellness.

Physicians and their families are active in their communities in many ways. For example, Dr. Tom Phillips of Spirit River coaches soccer and teaches painting. Annelle Gosseuw of High Level, a member of the Spousal Network Advisory Committee, teaches figure skating (yes, they do skate in sunny South Africa). Alida Milne of Fort Vermilion, also a Spousal Network Advisory Committee member, initiated involvement in the Communities in Bloom competition. Dr. Andries Botha of Grimshaw goes even further afield for a good cause. His Beyond Extreme bicycle tour in 2002 raised money for children in South Africa has brought

Monica Kohlhammer
(403) 283-1400
mkohlhammer@HSSAssociates.com

Sabbatical Leave - RPAP, in partnership with RHA #5 and DTHR, created a Sabbatical Leave pilot project to determine if the program will help retain physicians in rural Alberta communities. Two rural family physicians, Dr. H. Ullah from Ponoka and Dr. Dennis Ethier of Lacombe, have been successful candidates to date, currently working and living within RHA #5 and DTHR.

A Steering Committee consisting of representatives of DTHR, Region #5, AMA, and RPAP provide direction to the project. An evaluation of the project will also take place.

Quality of Care -The community of Milk River, south of Lethbridge and 20 minutes from the US border, will be participating with the Calgary Health Region in a rural pilot project towards prevention of renal disease. Individuals in the community will receive education on diabetes, blood pressure, nutrition and exercise for example. Milk River is one of eight rural sites for this program.

Monica Kohlhammer, Rural Physician Consultant from Monika Kohlhammer, Rural Physician Consultant South (at) (403) 283-1400.

If you have questions about these programs contact Leah Lechelt, Rural Physician Consultant North at (780) 432-2829 or Monica Kohlhammer, Rural Physician Consultant South at (403) 283-1400.

**NORTH**

**SOUTH**
The results are in from our first ever photo contest! RPAP wishes to express appreciation to all those who participated. The judging panel selected a winner in each of three categories and an overall grand prize winner. Prizes were sent to winners and all other entrants received a nifty RPAP T-shirt for their efforts. While not everyone could be a winner, we felt everyone's efforts should be acknowledged through this special edition of RPAP News.

Grand Prize Winner
Ken Russ, Hinton

Family Life Winner
Alida Milne, Fort Vermilion

Recreation Winner
Dave Holland, Lethbridge

Landscape Winner
Alida Milne, Fort Vermilion

Don't put your cameras away! We are accepting snapshots for the “day in the life of a rural physician and his family” photo contest until August 31.
n behalf of RPAP and the medical undergraduates from the Universities of Alberta and Calgary, we would like to thank all of the rural physicians who have volunteered to take part as a preceptor in the new RPAP Shadowing Program. The Program enables interested students to follow a rural physician around for all or part of a weekend on call and appears to be a great success with the students. The Shadowing Program would not be possible without rural physicians being willing to donate their time to help teach and to see that rural medicine continues to grow.

A thank you is also extended to Kevin Laskowski, President – U of A, Rural Interest Group and U of C Presidents Kim Voale and Carolyn Donnelly. These students have been working hard to help RPAP promote rural medicine to the medical undergraduates of the two universities.

The Preceptors who have had the opportunity to host a shadowing student to date are:

- Smoky Lake – Drs. Goldstuck, A. Raudenbemer, and S. Raudenbemer
- Black Diamond – Drs. Grisdale, Cumming, Higgins
- Three Hills – Drs. Reedyk, Taylor, Husband
- Drumheller Valley – Drs. Brocken, Thompson
- Cardston – Drs. Low, Allen, Clarke, Taylor, Bestor
- Edson – Drs. O’Callaghan, Quaye, Oubi, Govender, and Bland
- Vulcan – Dr. Wade
- Bonnyville – Drs. Hauptfleisch, Cunney, Ethier
- Viking – Drs. Jackman and Cunningham
- Cronesson Pass – Drs. Sara and Garbutt
- Coronation – Dr. McKenzie

Lac La Biche – Drs. Lindsay, Irltchill, Mare
Wainswright – Drs. Ramsay and Brizl
Strathmore – Dr. Curtin
Okotoks – Dr. Wiedenick
Stettler – Drs. Macmcnd and Ellatebe
Sundre – Drs. Warren and Irvine
Pincher Creek – Dr. Geibbe
Wataskiwin – Drs. Rekal, Jelley, and Schelder
Trochu – Dr. Vemaak
Vegrevile – Drs. Verster and Sung
Rocky Mountain House – Drs. Myers and Aasman

We look forward to connecting many more shadowing students with additional preceptors who have volunteered for the Shadowing Program.

U pcoming Event 2003

PHYSICIAN AND FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM (AMA)

Thank You!

Reclaiming Equilibrium, a group. Parenting Teens discussion/support program.

Finding Meaning in Medicine

Delta Lodge, Kananaskis

Development Workshop

Family Medicine Faculty

Conferences

Development Workshop

Upcoming Events 2003

Physician and Family Support Program (AMA)

Finding Meaning in Medicine

Discussion/support group.

Monthly, first Tuesday evenings commencing January 3, Calgary.

Parenting Teens discussion/support group. Four Wednesday evenings, January to April.


To register, contact FESF administration toll-free at 1-877-262-7377 or e-mail robin.robertson@albertadocctors.org

Conferences

Family Medicine Faculty Development Workshop

February 6 – 9

Dela Lodge, Kananaskis.

May 22–24, Calgary.

A Big Thank You!

Shadowing Program

New Skills Day Launched

Medical students attending the first ever RPAP “Skills Days” had an outstanding time learning how to put on casts, suture, do intubations, perform detailed patient assessments, use various instruments and even take blood pressure.

The first trials for this new program were held 9 November 2002 in Ponoka for U of A students and 10 November 2002 in Sundre for U of C students. We would like to thank the administration, staff and Drs. Brian Lee, Robert Halze, Z. Rafiq, Allan Garbutt, Ma. M. Lee, Mo. K. Angel, and EMS staff for the Ponoka event, and preceptors.

Drs. Carol Rowntree, Hal Irvine, Lee Cunning, John Irwin, Peter Warren, Allan Garbutt, and Rick Back for the Sundre one.

Comments from the students were very positive and they would like to have more of them. An advanced skills day is in the works for the new year. Skills to be taught on this day will include starting IV’s, intubating, patient histories etc.

Invaluable support for the RPAP Skills Day initiative was received from Welsh Allyn representative Rick Graham who loaned otoscopes, ophthalmoscopes, panoptic scopes, blood pressure cuffs and stethoscopes.

Streyker Canada’s representative Chris Skibington donated new polyurethane splinting material and assisted in Ponoka. Jim’s Andre Stephen, and Smyth & Nephew’s Kent Warmlock also donated supplies for the events.

Our sincere thanks to everyone who helped make these days so successful.

For more information about medical student programs, contact Bev Garbutt, Medical Students’ Initiatives Coordinator at (403) 628-2979 or abgar@telusplanet.net

Enrichment Program

Benefits Specialists

February 2003 RPAPNews

February 2003 RPAPNews
A Story We’ll Be Following
The Immigration Process Without a Lawyer

A High Level IMG and his spouse have decided to tackle the Canadian immigration process — without a lawyer.

“It’s primarily because of cost,” says Johann’s wife Retha. “After listening to a presentation at an RPAP-sponsored event and looking at the process outlined in RPAP’s new orientation guide, we decided to work our way through the process ourselves. We understand that others have done it and many of Johann’s colleagues here in High Level have offered their support.”

“We’ve launched the process,” continues Retha. New immigration requirements and procedures came into effect on 28 June 2002. I called Citizenship and Immigration Canada and got the address for the application forms. The first steps in the process are taken by the RHA completing certain forms. I am also applying for a work permit and called Human Resources Foreign Worker Unit to get that underway. The process may take between one and two years to complete.”

We will update you on the van der Vyver’s progress in future issues of RPAP News. Dr. Johann van der Vyver has a three year contract in High Level.

Contribute to the Rural Research Agenda

Rural researcher, Pamela Brett-MacLean, has been recruited by the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Alberta with RPAP support, to develop a research program that will contribute to rural family medicine in Alberta. Along with a team of respected collaborators (including Dr. Jill Konkin, Dr. Donna Marcu, and Dr. David Topps), she has initiated a study to develop an agenda for research in rural family medicine in Alberta.

Using an on-line Delphi survey approach, the research team hopes to identify 10 key areas or themes as priorities in rural family medicine in Alberta, based on the perspectives, concerns and interests of Alberta rural family physicians selected as key informants for the present study. The Delphi process will proceed through a number of rounds (three-five in total), with each round directed to developing broad consensus across the group, although the team anticipates some research themes or areas will be characterized by a diversity of opinion.

The entire study will be completed on-line over a two-three month period (beginning mid-to late February 2003), with participants’ actual time commitment estimated at 3-4 hours. Participants will receive an honorarium of $400 for contributing to the study. It is hoped that 20-25 practicing rural family physicians will be involved. To nominate yourself and/or one or two colleagues who have a good level of experience and interest in rural family medicine, or to learn more about this initiative, contact Shenin Edmondstone at (780) 492-8102 or e-mail: sedmondstone@med.ualberta.ca

A new Orientation Guide to Medical Practice and Life in Rural Alberta, developed by the RPAP, is striking a chord with some newcomers to rural Alberta.

Messages on some mailback feedback cards show the Orientation Guide’s value:

“This Guide was very useful. I wish I had had it in 2000 when I commenced rural practice.”

“This resource was particularly good at showing the step-by-step requirements to practice here. If I had had a resource such as this 4-5 years ago, this would have answered all my questions and saved me countless phone calls. Well done, excellent work.”

“Excellent compilation of information. Keep it the same – just update the information.”

RPAP developed the Guide with input from physicians, regional health authorities, Colleges, the AMA, government departments and many more, including brief descriptions as well as website and phone access information, the Guide is designed to:

• Help ease the transition into rural practice and rural life for newly recruited physicians and their families,
• Be a handy reference for practicing rural physicians, and
• Be used as a recruitment tool for rural communities and practicing physicians.

A new Orientation Guide to Medical Practice and Life in Rural Alberta, developed by the RPAP, is striking a chord with some newcomers to rural Alberta.

The Guide was mailed to all rural physicians and members on the Rural Physician Spousal Network list this fall. On an ongoing basis, RPAP will mail it to physicians on monthly new registrant lists provided by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta. The mailout will be followed by personal telephone calls by the Rural Physician Consultants (North and South) to see if additional assistance is required.

Included with the Guide was a new brochure, Recruiting and Immigration Steps for International Medical Graduates. The RPAP welcomes any feedback on this information, which was developed in collaboration with Human Resources and Development Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The information and forms contained in the brochure are also available on the RPAP web site.
Welcome
New Rural Alberta Physician Families

Please join us in welcoming the following physicians and their families who moved to rural Alberta since August 2002. The RPAP News will regularly welcome newcomers, using information supplied by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta.

AUGUST 2002
Dr. Allyson Jill Adolph – Lethbridge
Dr. Nicol Basson – Fort Vermilion
Dr. Jan Gideon Joubert – Slave Lake
Dr. Prakash Jugnundan – Wabasca
Dr. Charles Gordon Metcalfe – Red Deer
Dr. James Christopher Richards – Bassano
Dr. William Lane McKenzie Robson – Redwood Meadows
Dr. Tejinder Sainbhee – Camrose
Dr. Nirmal Kumar Shahoo – Red Deer
Dr. Daniel Tailliferre Hauman van der Merwe – Fort McMurray
Dr. Catherine Anne White – Cold Lake

SEPTEMBER 2002
Dr. Wayne John Edwards – Lethbridge
Dr. Philip Louis Immelman – High Prairie
Dr. Maria Hema Kreywicks – Red Deer
Dr. Stephen Kwan – Ponoka
Dr. Fernando David Moreno Merlo – Medicine Hat

OCTOBER 2002
Dr. Gerit Dekker – Fort Vermilion
Dr. Gert Cornelis Du Plessis – High Level
Dr. Johannes Lukas Le Roux – High Level
Dr. Hermanus Hendrikus J. Potgieter – Viking
Dr. Peter James Sevastos – Lethbridge
Dr. Victor Steeks – High Prairie
Dr. Jay Jianhang Sun – Slave Lake
Dr. Philip Lodewyk Vogel – Stettler

Further information and details on the RPAP and its initiatives may be obtained from:
David Kay, RPAP Program Manager
Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan
1003 Memorial Hrs
10140-101 Street Edmonton
Alberta, Canada T5J 3S2

Phone: (780) 423-9911
Toll free: 1-866-423-9911
Fax: (780)423-9917
Alberta-RPAP@rpap.ab.ca
www.rpap.ab.ca

Study Participants Wanted

Canada is facing a major shortage of all professionals within the next decade. To address these predicted shortages, education programs across the country are beginning to enroll more students with the result that additional field experience sites outside the traditional urban settings must be considered. The need to encourage and engage more rural/remote professionals to act as preceptors is crucial. An understanding of the role of educating professionals for rural/remote communities will be invaluable to facilitate the process.

The following persons are seeking professionals (physicians, nurses, students, managers) willing to participate in a study to determine factors that influence the education of health professionals in, and for, rural/remote practice:

Dr. E. (Betty) Thomlinson, Faculty of Nursing, University of Calgary;
Ms. Meg K. McDonagh, Faculty of Nursing, University of Calgary;
Dr. Carol Rouxmo, Faculty of Medicine, University of Calgary; Greenwood Family Physicians, Sundre, AB and
Ms. Bonnie Jones, Director Patient Services, Sundre General Hospital.

The University of Calgary is asking participants to take part in individual interviews or focus groups (whichever they desire) at a time and place that would be convenient for them. If you are interested in participating, contact:
Dr. Betty Thomlinson at (403) 220-6917 or e-mail: thomlin@ucalgary.ca

Funded by Alberta Health and Wellness