

Wingham & Area Health Professionals Recruitment

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North Huron Council

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Our Goal

It is the goal of this committee to ensure residents of Wingham and the surrounding communities served by the Wingham Hospital and North Huron Family Health Team have access to primary care physicians and healthcare professionals. Ongoing recruitment and retention of physicians in our community is vital to the health and wellness of our residents as well as the economic impact it derives.

Our Current Physician Situation

There are three areas of physician coverage that encompass our current physician situation; permanent practice Family Medicine docs, Emergency Department (ED) coverage and visiting specialists.

Permanent Family Medicine Docs

- We have 8 docs in the North Huron Family Health Team (FHT).
- Our FHT roster is approx 9500 patients. Our catchment area population is 16000.
- There are 3100 unrostered Amish/Mennonite cared for by our docs. Due to cultural beliefs, these are self-pay patients and are not included in the FHT's 9500 rostered patient number recognized by the Ministry of Health even though they are under the care of our physicians.
- Of our 8 docs, 3 are over 60 years old.
- In addition, 3 of our docs have patient rosters of close to 2000 patients each. New docs typically roster between 700-1000 patients maximum. We will need to recruit at least 2 new docs to replace 1 of these docs. Potentially 6 docs to replace 3.
- Expectations of rural docs are vast and they wear many hats. While it is very rewarding, it is also taxing. They provide many services; primary care clinics, ED, inpatients, nursing home, surgical assist, anesthesia, coroner, oncology, lumps and bumps clinics, home visits as well as teaching medical learners.

Emergency Department Coverage

- Only 3 Wingham docs of 8 work in our ED. This leaves us extremely dependent on ED locums.
- Our Wingham docs cover 42% of our ED hours; the remaining 58% is covered by locums who essentially have little commitment to Wingham.
- We have an approx pool of 11-13 docs who are in our "ED locum pool." Recruitment is ongoing to keep a devoted pool of physicians to cover our ED.

Visiting Specialists

- Availability of a breadth of medical specialists is a critical component to our rural hospital. Patient access close to home as well as our own docs having access to specialists is an indispensable service to rural healthcare facilities.
- We have approx 10 visiting specialists of varying disciplines; Internal Medicine, Ear/Nose Throat, OB/Gyn, Cardiology, Oncology, Surgical, Radiology, Physical Medicine, Pediatrics and Urology.

Our Execution

- Attend medical school and industry recruitment events to keep Wingham's name at the forefront of prospective recruits. Most docs have never heard of our rural location. We attend approx 7 per year.
- Coordinating medical learners to come to Wingham to experience our rural medicine program as well as our community is essential to recruitment. It is highly probable that a new recruit can be gained through past educational experiences. We host approx 10 medical learners per year.
- We work with area students from our regional area studying medicine as well as support a bursary for high school students planning a career in healthcare.
- We collaborate with residency program leaders at medical schools to connect with new grads for permanent and ED placements.
- We coordinate with HealthForce Ontario for Ministry programs/incentives as well as for leads on International Medical Graduates or candidates in existing practice wanting to relocate.
- Network with recruitment coordinators across the province to share information regarding potential recruits. For example; a location may not need a Family Doc, but will point them in Wingham's direction and vice versa if we have a lead on a specialty another location may be searching for we can help place them.
- Fundraise and create community awareness. We host a golf tournament as well as a "Dining for Docs" fundraiser annually.

Our Challenges

- Spousal employment. We have lost approx 5 recruits due to lack of spousal opportunities. These were recruits who were deciding between Wingham and one other location. Generally speaking, physicians have their choice of practice location. That being said, often final decisions weigh heavily on opinions and opportunities of their partner.
- While those of us who live here may disagree, our location is a challenge for physician recruitment. Potential recruits and their families who are accustomed to urban amenities can find rural living arduous. Even though we are close to the lake, we are not on the lake. The closest mall is an hour away. These location considerations have factored into decisions of potential recruits.
- Aligning personal and professional goals of a physician, their partner, as well as their family unit can be difficult. Recruiting a doc extends beyond the medical component.
- A new recruit must feel a complimentary fit with our current medical staff.
- As important as finding new recruits is, retention cannot be overlooked. Keeping the docs we have is a critical component of recruitment activities.
- Balancing recruitment needs between invested stakeholders can be precarious. Recruitment Committee, community, hospital administration and the physician group themselves all have varying perspectives.