

Primary Healthcare Provider Recruitment & Retention Program 2020 Update

Council meeting date: November 24, 2020

Report date: October 20, 2020

Summary

During the 2020 Budget deliberations, Council requested an update on the Primary Healthcare Provider Recruitment and Retention Program and the results this initiative has generated to date.

Coordinated through the Economic Development division, this program has achieved considerable results since its inception, and even with limited resources more recently, it continues to garner success to the benefit of the community despite the discontinuation of incentive grants through return-of-service agreements. In fact by the end of 2020, this program will have resulted in the recruitment of 83 family physicians who will provide primary care for approximately 114,500 citizens. Nevertheless, through attrition and retirement of existing family practices, there remains a need to continue recruitment of new primary healthcare providers to the community.

The following report will provide an outline of these results.

Background

A major focus of the previous *Strategic Physician Recruitment and Retention Program 2007-2011* and the current *Primary Healthcare Provider Recruitment and Retention Program* is to enhance the City of Greater Sudbury's efforts at recruiting family physicians and nurse practitioners, to ensure that citizens have regular access to a primary health care provider.

The City of Greater Sudbury has experienced much success since the start of the enhanced physician recruitment program. In fact the best practices and tactics from this program have since been utilized and incorporated into other programs and initiatives such as the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot as well as ongoing community efforts to attract and welcome international students to our community.

Since 2008, 89 family physicians and three nurse practitioners were recruited using the various initiatives found within the program, as follows:

- Four of the 89 family physician recruits have left the community following completion of their return of service period due to decisions to pursue other opportunities
- An additional two family physicians who were recruited without the use of return of service agreements, have also relocated.

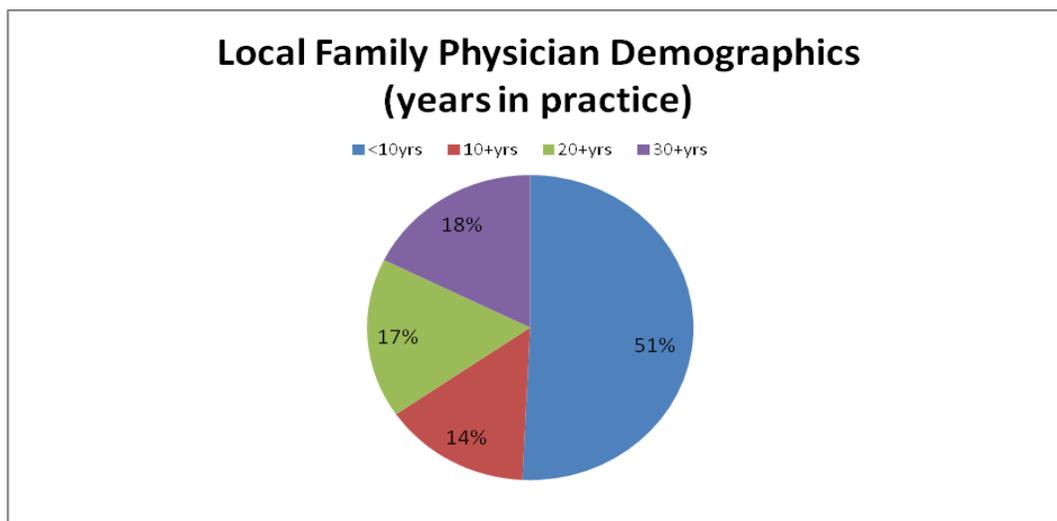
By the end of this year, out of the 83 remaining family physician recruits,

- 78 of the 83 future family physicians will have begun practice in Greater Sudbury;
- The remaining 5 future family physicians are scheduled to begin practice in 2021
- These 83 family physicians will provide primary care for approximately 114,500 citizens.

Note that some individuals who received return of service incentives from the City of Greater Sudbury decided to change the type and location of their practice plans resulting in ineligibility for incentives from the City of Greater Sudbury and had to return the funds. These individuals are not included in the recruitment numbers provided above. The funds returned were then re-invested by offering that incentive money to other recruits.

Even with the successes experienced in recruitment,

- Each year we are losing approximately three to four family physicians, mostly due to retirement.
- Family physicians who are retiring have much larger practices than what new family physicians typically take on. In some cases it takes several new family physicians to fill a vacancy left by a retiring physician. Staff are aware of two family physicians planning to retire in the next year who combined have a large patient roster. It is estimated that it could take 4-6 new family physicians to take over this number of patients.
- Currently 18% of our 130 family physicians have over 30 years in practice, and it can be assumed that attrition due to retirement will continue for several years to come.
- By contrast, once all new recruits begin to practice, just over half of the family physicians in Greater Sudbury will have been in practice less than 10 years. These are newly minted physicians who have their choice of practice locations, and the fact that they are choosing Greater Sudbury is a positive indication that recruitment efforts are achieving results.



ECONOMIC IMPACT OF A FAMILY PHYSICIAN

The Physician Recruitment program can demonstrate return on the City's investment and benefits to the community with some impressive numbers:

- Several studies indicate that the economic multiplier for family medicine practices ranges between 1.5 - 2.05.

- Taking this into account, based on the recruitment of 83 family physicians, using the lowest economic multiplier of 1.5, combined they will contribute approximately \$49.8 million annually into our local economy.
- Studies also indicate that family physician practices contribute significantly to local job creation through direct/indirect jobs. Examples of direct jobs would include the hiring of physician themselves and those who provide patient care under the supervision or referral of physicians – including all employees in the offices of physicians as well as in pharmacies, home health care services, outpatient care centres, medical and diagnostic laboratories, other ambulatory health care services, hospitals, and nursing care facilities.
- It is important to note that each family physician office is essentially a small business which is responsible for paying for property costs, utilities and expenses associated with staffing and supplies.

It is quite evident that the work undertaken in recruitment has not only increased access to primary health care services for citizens, but has also made a significant contribution towards the local economy and has supported local job creation.

Another important point to highlight is that when large companies are looking for communities to locate to and invest in, part of their search criteria is frequently the availability and access to health care services within the community for their future employees to ensure a healthy workforce. The City of Greater Sudbury is well positioned when compared to other areas, with several family physicians located across the community currently accepting new patients.

The Role of the City of Greater Sudbury and Staff

Despite not currently offering financial incentives, the City of Greater Sudbury continues to experience success with its recruitment efforts. The strategy has remained effective due to the complementary support and resources provided by staff, as well as the promotion of the general advantages associated with living in the City of Greater Sudbury. These support services and resources include the following:

- Finding locums for existing physicians to cover for leaves of absence/maternity leaves
- Linking new family physicians with practice opportunities available across the CGS
- Provide overview of current practice opportunities including site tours
- Answering community-related questions
- Providing support to the recruits family (e.g. assistance with finding schools for children, spousal employment opportunities and so on)
- Customized city tours
- Assistance with housing/accommodation searches
- Occasional special requests and settlement assistance

Staff are also involved in several committees including the Northeastern Healthcare and Recruitment Association led by the Regional Advisor of Ontario Health – Health Force Ontario, and the Health Sciences North Medical Human Resources Planning Committee. Involvement on these committees allows staff to be further connected at a regional level as well as to ensure a better understanding of the physician recruitment priorities within Health Sciences North.

Building a strong relationship with NOSM learners and staff

With the official opening of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) in September of 2005, the City of Greater Sudbury gained a crucial resource for the future of healthcare in our community. Research has shown that a significant number of new physicians end up practicing in the communities in which they were trained. Furthermore, NOSM is mandated to train medical professionals for future practice in rural, remote and northern communities. As such, the learners who graduate from NOSM are better acquainted with practice models and opportunities in Greater Sudbury.

NOSM is the ideal solution to the specific physician shortages faced by our community. Many NOSM learners are local to Greater Sudbury and the region, and are interested in practicing in our community following residency training. However, without the proper programs in place, and acknowledging that these individuals are in high demand and may be courted by other communities in the province, they may not stay here. As a municipal government, the City has continued to strengthen its relationship with current and future medical learners and works to foster the development of these learners by providing adequate opportunities for social and professional relationships to be established within our community, encouraging them to “put down roots” and retaining them for the long term.

Staff have also built strong relationships with the staff at NOSM. For instance, CGS staff have participated in numerous committees comprised mainly of NOSM staff and tasked with the planning of conferences and other NOSM-hosted events. CGS staff also provide services such as city tours when NOSM has visiting candidates or guests.

INCENTIVES

In previous years, a major component of the physician recruitment program included the use of financial incentives which allowed the City of Greater Sudbury to remain competitive considering many municipalities were offering quite lucrative incentive packages. Since 2019, an incentive budget has not been in place so the recruitment program now focuses entirely on the marketing initiatives and staff support provided to potential recruits.

From 2008 to 2018, with the exception of 2016, funding for incentives was provided through one-time funding commitments from City Council. Each year, a one-time funding request had been proposed based on the projections for the upcoming year. As indicated above beginning in 2019 no budget has been in place to provide for financial incentives.

Funding commitments had declined over time since the inception of the program as follows:

2008 - \$220,000
2009 - \$380,000
2010 - \$500,000
2011 - \$440,000
2012 - \$400,000
2013 - \$200,000
2014 - \$150,000
2015 - \$150,000
2016 – 0

2017 - \$150,000
2018 - \$150,000
2019 – 0
2020 – 0

In 2016, funding for the incentive component was provided entirely by funds collected from previously returned incentive payments.

Recently some additional incentive repayments have occurred. These dollars are returned to the City by the participants once their return-of-service agreements are terminated, and they are then available to be offered as incentives to potential recruits through a new two-year return-of-service agreement. In this way the City has maintained the ability to offer limited incentive grants and has maximized the resources available to support this program without requiring new budget for the grants.

MARKETING INITIATIVES

In the absence of financial incentives, marketing our community to medical learners and visiting physicians, and providing the individualized assistance to medical learners and potential physician recruits as noted above, are now the main components of the overall strategy, achieving demonstrated success.

This year due to COVID-19 staff temporarily pivoted away from the traditional tactics previously used in the recruitment program which involved mostly in-person events and interactions. As an alternative, staff have been exploring virtual options to continue building relationships with potential recruits to effectively market practice opportunities currently available in Greater Sudbury.

For instance, each September the City of Greater Sudbury hosts an annual welcome event on the William Ramsey Cruise Boat for the first year NOSM students as part of their orientation week.

This year, as an alternative, Mayor Bigger and City staff took part in a virtual session which allowed the opportunity to meet the first year class and to inform them of the support services provided to them.

Similarly, in early December staff will be attending a virtual Community Engagement session with the NOSM Family Medicine Residents, hosted by Ontario Health, which will provide an opportunity to market opportunities to those approaching the completion of their medical training and who may be interested in practicing in Greater Sudbury. Staff will continue to identify and take part in virtual events to ensure the momentum of the program continues while COVID restrictions are in place.

Marketing initiatives as part of the Primary Healthcare Provider Recruitment and Retention Program are funded through the annual physician recruitment and retention marketing budget which is \$32,500 in 2020. The marketing budget has been reduced by 60% from \$80,356 in 2010.

The following is a breakdown of the annual budget allocation for recruitment and retention marketing, included in the Operational budget of the Economic Development division:

2008 - \$78,000
2009 - \$79,560
2010 - \$80,356
2011 - \$80,356
2012 - \$75,356
2013 - \$75,356
2014 - \$75,356
2015 - \$36,356
2016 - \$35,000
2017 - \$35,000
2018 - \$32,500
2019 - \$32,500
2020 - \$32,500

The City of Greater Sudbury Primary Healthcare Provider Recruitment Program continues to be actively involved in attracting new family physicians and nurse practitioners to our community. Pre-COVID, showcasing our city to both medical learners and visiting physicians was done through the following initiatives:

i) Northern Ontario School of Medicine Medical Learner Orientation/Social events

Every year the City of Greater Sudbury sponsors and hosts numerous events for the new and continuing medical learners at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) which highlight the lifestyle opportunities which exist in Greater Sudbury while affording us the opportunity to strengthen relationships with these future physicians. By strengthening relationships with these learners, staff are able to identify those who plan to remain in the community to practice and remain in contact with those who have not yet made practice decisions.

Examples of previous events are as follows:

- Afternoon skate on Ramsey Lake Skate Path
- Sleigh ride & Dinner
- William Ramsey Cruise Welcome Event for new NOSM medical students
- Sudbury Yacht Club Welcome Event for new NOSM medical residents
- Science North/Dynamic Earth Tours (year-round/as requested)

ii) Guided City Tours

The City of Greater Sudbury regularly provides guided city tours to prospective medical learners and visiting physicians. Coordinated and hosted by CGS staff, these tours include visiting various points of interest throughout the city while answering any questions that candidates may have.

- Personalized to focus on an individual's interests.
- Coordinated for events such as the Canadian Residency Matching Service interview weekend, as fourth year medical students from across the country and around the World are in Sudbury, being interviewed for available spots in the NOSM residency program.

- Perfect opportunity to showcase our community first-hand to a very broad audience.

iii) “Welcome to Greater Sudbury” Packages

The City of Greater Sudbury provides the Northern Ontario School of Medicine with welcome packages for all students and residents who come to our community for their training. Learners are provided with an opportunity to experience our community through a selection of complimentary passes to attractions throughout the city, generously provided by some of our community partners. Partners include:

- Science North/Dynamic Earth
- Sudbury Theatre Centre
- Sudbury Yacht Club
- Sudbury Wolves

Other information in the packages may include visitor guides, leisure guides, maps, trail maps, real estate information and other brochures on attractions and amenities available to our guests.

iv) Events to Reduce Professional and Social Isolation

Coordinating physician-resident-student events helps foster professional relationships between medical learners at NOSM and established physicians in the City of Greater Sudbury. Trained to practice in rural locations, NOSM students are ideal candidates to practice in the smaller outlying communities of Greater Sudbury. By encouraging professional relationships between our medical learners and established medical professionals, the City of Greater Sudbury can promote ties between learners and practitioners that could lead to recruitment.

v) Other Events

Northern Ontario School of Medicine Family Medicine Residents Holiday Gathering

Annually, the CGS sponsors a holiday gathering for the family residents during their December Academic Rounds. Academic Rounds take place monthly where NOSM Residents who are located across Northeastern Ontario come to Sudbury for various group training sessions taking place over a two day period. This December dinner event is an opportunity to foster healthy relationships with future family medicine practitioners and to share information with the group.

Northern Ontario School of Medicine Graduation Celebration

The City of Greater Sudbury sponsors the annual NOSM Graduation Celebration which takes place each spring. This student-organized formal provides those graduating from the undergraduate program at NOSM an opportunity to celebrate their achievements with family and friends. It also provides staff with an opportunity to:

- Congratulate the graduating class
- Showcase our community to a group of bright, driven and determined future physicians, many of whom will be coming back to Sudbury to practice after completing residency training.
- Build a strong relationship with those moving onto residency programs across the country.

Staff work with contacts at NOSM to provide resources and advice as appropriate to assist with the planning of events such as the graduation celebration event.

RETENTION INITIATIVES

While recruiting primary healthcare professionals is of paramount importance to improving overall healthcare in our community, equally important is retaining them for the long term. The City of Greater Sudbury continues to host and/or support the following retention events to show appreciation for current providers, the services that they provide to our community and their continued dedication towards their profession:

- Physician and Family Appreciation Day Brunch
- Docs on Greens Golf Tournament
- Sudbury and District Medical Society (SDMS) Christmas Party

Unfortunately due to COVID-19, the 17th Annual Physician and Family Appreciation Day Brunch was cancelled due to the large group size expected to attend.

A golf tournament hosted by the Sudbury and District Medical Society did take place while ensuring that all COVID-19 legislation was followed. Despite being allowed up to 50 golfers, the Sudbury and District Medical Society restricted the group size to 20.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND OTHER SUPPORT

Physician Recruitment Community Partnership

The City of Greater Sudbury has created strong community partnerships with local businesses to support recruitment and retention. Through in-kind donations and private sector funding, the CGS secures additional resources to support various initiatives to help market our community.

Through these affiliations, staff have been able to provide medical students and residents with complimentary passes to local attractions.

In some cases, businesses located in some of our outlying communities have contributed goods and services to be put towards a “recruitment package” for physicians who are considering setting up in their areas. These incentive packages further assist in encouraging new family physicians to practice in outlying communities.

Affiliations with local businesses provide access to a multitude of support services and programs that are invaluable to new physicians and their families. As well, community partners may provide an important source of employment opportunities for spouses of physicians.

Conclusion

The current *City of Greater Sudbury Primary Healthcare Provider Recruitment and Retention Program* and the former *City of Greater Sudbury Strategic Physician Recruitment and Retention*

Program 2007 – 2011 have proven to be effective at recruiting family physicians and nurse practitioners to Greater Sudbury. The results of the program have had a significant impact within the community, allowing many citizens to gain regular access to a primary healthcare provider who otherwise would not have had one.