Northern Ontario School of Medicine
École de médecine du Nord de l'Ontario
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The Needs of the Many:
NOSM Students' Experience of Generalism and Rural Practice

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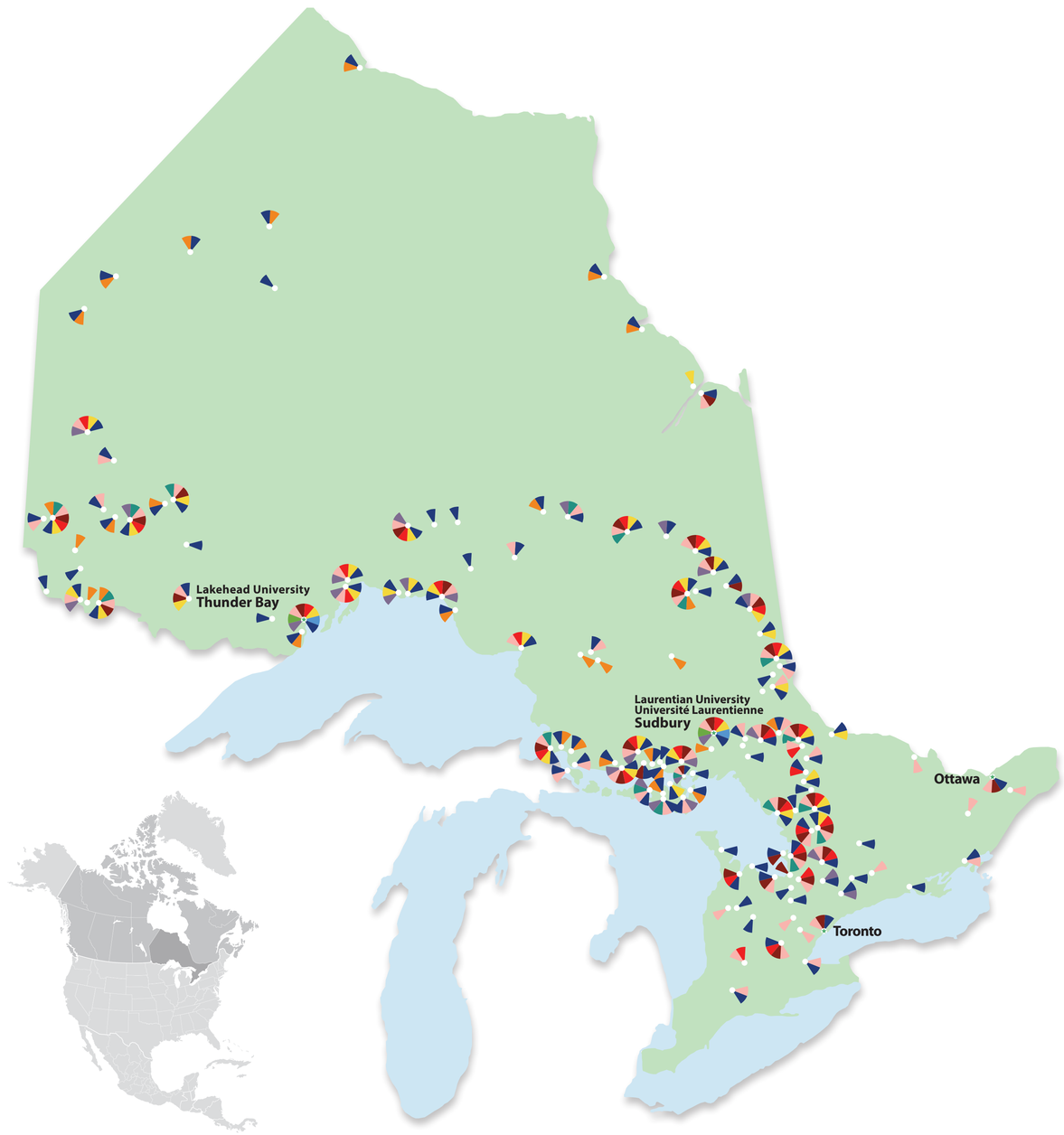
Background

The Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) opened in 2005 with a social accountability mandate focused on improving the health of the people of Northern Ontario. NOSM recruits students from Northern Ontario or similar backgrounds and provides Distributed Community Engaged Learning in over 90 clinical and community settings located in the region, a vast underserved rural part of Canada. After 12 years, there is evidence that NOSM is successful in producing generalist physicians who choose to practice in Northern Ontario or in similar northern, remote, rural community settings. 62% of NOSM MD graduates have chosen to train in family medicine (predominantly rural), 33% other general specialties (internal medicine, general surgery, pediatrics, etc) and the remaining 5% are pursuing careers in subspecialties like dermatology, ophthalmology and plastic surgery. NOSM offers residency programs in family medicine and eight other general specialties. 94% of NOSM MD graduates who undertook residency training in Northern Ontario are practising in Northern Ontario, including 33% in the smaller communities.



Aims

In the context of a growing focus on generalism in health care, this poster explores the NOSM student and graduate experiences of generalism in rural practice.

> "A philosophy of care that is distinguished by a commitment to the breadth of practice within each discipline and collaboration with the larger health care team in order to respond to patient and community needs."
>
> **RCPSC 2011**

Student Experience Themes

- "doing everything" includes knowing when to refer rural practitioners are "true generalists"
- a complete package, ranging from promoting prevention to performing specialist tasks
- NOSM provides intensive clinical training through community engagement

Methods

NOSM and the Laurentian University Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research (CRaNHR) tracking studies use mixed methods drawing on data from various sources including interviews of students, graduates and other informants. This poster reports on a qualitative research analysis of semi-structured interviews involving 37 graduating medical students and 9 practising NOSM graduates.

Results

Key themes from student observations include an affinity for the Northern Ontario environment and a recognition that rural medicine involves a broad scope of practice. NOSM students consider generalist care as a comprehensive service with a strong focus on responding to the health needs of the community they serve. Beyond primary care, a rural medicine "true generalist" is viewed as a complete package, a doctor who provides care ranging from promoting prevention to performing specialist tasks.

Conclusion

Rural generalist medicine is not an alternative to urban specialist care, rather it is the explicit provision of quality healthcare within the geographic, demographic and cultural context, and the human and material resource constraints of rural communities. Rural practitioners, particularly in family medicine, are extended generalists with a broad scope of practice guided by the health needs of the communities they serve. NOSM students' and graduates' experience of rural generalism is positive and highly influential in determining their career direction including specialty, scope and location of practice. NOSM's generalist approach may be effective beyond rural applications and an advantageous approach for foundational medical education. Students and graduates report that the NOSM Distributed Community Engaged Learning prepares them well for rural generalist practice.

Reference

Strasser R. Delivering on Social Accountability: Canada's Northern Ontario School of Medicine. *The Asia-Pacific Scholar*. 2016; 1(1): 1-6