

MRG Lauds Northern Medical School, but Who Can Afford It?

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The Medical Reform Group today applauded the Ontario Government decision to create a northern medical school.

"Opposition parties and government reports have been calling for this action," commented MRG spokesperson Dr. Rosanna Pellizzari. "The decision should receive widespread support."

Canada, like other countries with a relatively large and geographically distant rural population, has had great difficulty providing adequate physician services to rural communities.

"A northern medical school won't solve the problem," commented another MRG spokesperson, Dr. PJ Devereaux, "but it is likely to help. Future governments must monitor the extent to which graduates of the institution ultimately establish practices in rural communities."

Dr. Pellizzari raised concerns about the affordability of the medical education the new school would offer. "With medical school fees over \$10,000 a year and rising, many northern families will be unable to afford to send their children to the new school." Dr. Pellizzari called on the government to scale back medical school tuitions. "Encouraging northern Ontario medical trainees while excluding Canadians of modest means is a hypocritical policy," she concluded.

Dr. Devereaux raised a second concern. "Finding high quality clinical placements for trainees will be a major challenge," he cautioned. "Ensuring that the new school provides a top rank medical education will require careful thought and planning, the co-operation of the medical community throughout the province, and adequate resource allocation. Given the current government's continued commitment to corporate tax cuts, we worry that the huge funding requirements for the new school will lead other public health and education programs to suffer."

Dr. Pellizzari added a final note of caution. "Although the northern medical school will address some of the physician maldistribution issues, only real primary care reform, with multidisciplinary teams, including nurse

practitioners, providing comprehensive care in group practices and community health centres, will ensure that all Ontarians have access to the kind of care they now lack."