

Foreign doctors lured to Alberta

Rising number of overseas recruits help ease shortage

MICHELLE LANG
CALGARY HERALD

New statistics suggest foreign doctors are an increasingly important resource as Alberta faces a severe physician shortage, with 40 per cent of new medical licences in the province going to physicians trained outside of Canada.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta released figures this week that show 224 of the 557 new doctors who secured a licence to practise in 2008 were international medical graduates.

That's a significant increase from a few years ago when the college says only one-quarter of new doctors went to medical school in another country.

"It's the highest percentage ever," said Dr. Trevor Theman, registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta.

"It's largely because we have a huge demand and Alberta

has been a really attractive place to work."

Experts say some of the foreign-trained physicians are moving to Alberta from overseas.

Many others are relocating here after working for a few years in another province such as Newfoundland or Saskatchewan, where it is easier to obtain a medical licence.

Organizations such as the Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan, which helps recruit doctors, say a variety of factors are luring physicians to this province, including salaries among the highest in Canada.

Family doctors in Alberta, for example, billed \$267,000 in 2005-06 — more than their counterparts in any other province, according to the most recent figures available from the Canadian Institute of Health Information. The billings don't include doctors' overhead costs.

"Fees for physicians are good here," said David Kay of the Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan. "It's a good place to live and work and that's reflected by people migrating here, not just physicians."

The statistics come as Alberta faces a physician shortage.

SEE DOCTORS, PAGE A3

ER

**CALGARY
BUSINESS**

Independent energy firms flush with \$16B

DOCTORS: Looking overseas

FROM AI

The Alberta Medical Association estimates the province needs 1,000 more doctors today and will need 1,500 within three years.

In Calgary alone, about one-quarter of city residents don't have a regular family physician.

Data from Alberta's College of Physicians and Surgeons shows South African physicians are the largest group of foreign doctors coming to the province.

Fifty-three physicians from South Africa, where training is considered equivalent to Canadian programs, obtained a licence to practise in the province last year.

Some doctors who trained in other countries may have a difficult time working in Alberta. Only five physicians who went to medical school in China, for example, were licensed to practise in the province last year.

The statistics show 18 of Alberta's new doctors went to medical school in India, while 15 trained in Pakistan.

Theman said these physicians likely trained in another country following medical school, or worked in another Canadian province before

coming to Alberta.

Good paycheques may be one factor luring foreign doctors to the province, but dozens of rural communities that are actively recruiting international graduates is another factor.

In Castor, a small town east of Red Deer, hospital officials said they are hiring a physician from Scotland after two years of searching.

"It's very rare to have interest from a Canadian," said Marilyn Weber, executive director at Our Lady of the Rosary Hospital in Castor.

"Most of the (resumes) I get are from foreign grads."

Meanwhile, the Alberta International Medical Graduate Program, which assesses foreign doctors who are already in the province and helps them upgrade their training, said its clients are also contributing to the trend.

About 60 physicians from the program have completed their training in recent years and most are now working in the province.

"We contribute to that growth," said Howard Wright, co-ordinator

with the program. "We know (our doctors) tend to stay here in the province."

While Alberta has had recent success attracting international physicians, some observers wonder if the trend will continue now that the province's oil-fuelled boom has slowed.

"Fees for physicians are good here," said Kay. "My guess is we'll still have a net advantage."

MLANG@THEHERALD.
CANWEST.COM

Massive Rug

- Fine handmade Persian and Oriental rugs at prices you will not believe.

For Limited Time Only

- Decorate your home with magnificent designs and colours at affordable prices.
- Interior Designers welcome!

The Rug Liquidator

For more info, please call 403-398-7755
6008 Macleod Trail S.W.
Unit 104 Calgary (Across from Chinook Cent