

MAINTAINING PATHOLOGY SERVICES IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

*It's not about the determining the right number,
it's about being competitive in the Canadian market.*

- Over the past decade, many jurisdictions in Canada have conducted reviews or held significant discussions concerning the state of laboratory medicine. All have concluded that there is a significant shortage of laboratory physicians across Canada. Between 1992 to 2002 the actual number of pathologists working in Canada declined by more than ten percent, while over the same period workload and service demands increased.
- This situation may worsen considerably in coming years as a large number of pathologists near retirement age. At the present time Canada is not graduating enough laboratory specialists to meet our current demands. All provinces will need to rely on the recruitment and retention of international medical graduates (IMGs) to maintain service levels.
- In a 2002 discussion paper an Ontario Provincial Advisory Group identified a benchmark goal of 5.5 full time equivalents (FTEs) per 100,000 population. Similarly, the Canadian Association of Pathologists (CAP) in a 2001 presentation to the Romanow Commission identified a standard of 5.2 FTEs per 100,000. Both reports noted that Canada is well below these levels at the present time.
 - *The Ontario paper suggests that province is short somewhere between 80 to 150 laboratory physicians.*
- Applying these standards to NL would result in a laboratory medicine complement of 27 or 28 physicians on an FTE basis (30 to 31 head count). At the present time there are 25 pathologists working in the province or about 22 FTEs. In the coming months two of the group will retire, as well, it is possible that an additional two to four will leave the province resulting in an FTE complement of 16 to 17.
 - *NL may need to recruit 6 to 8 pathologists within the next year to maintain service levels.*
- On a population basis, this level of staffing would put NL marginally ahead of ONT – 3.1 per 100,000 versus 3.0 with both provinces being significantly below the average of the other provinces.
- When you consider NL's older population, dispersed sites, lack of scale, range of work, and technologist support, such a staffing level would likely result in a dangerously low level of services that would impact elements of our entire medical system.
- In recent years we have had little or no success in attracting laboratory physicians to work in the province. At the same time we have been even less successful in retaining these increasingly scarce specialists.
- It is critical that NL introduce immediate measures to stabilize pathology services. It may be significantly easier to address this situation in a proactive manner rather than trying to resolve a crisis. As a starting point, we must be able to offer compensation packages and working conditions that make us competitive with jurisdictions such as Ontario.

no data