

Mental health care in northern, rural, and isolated areas of BC



Dr Marlene Hunter

The idea for an issue that focuses on mental health care in northern, rural, and isolated areas in British Columbia began with an article on health care in general in those areas (*BCMJ* 2003;45[1]:16). That earlier piece stressed that although it is difficult enough to provide good general health care, it is even more daunting to provide good mental health care.

This issue offers perspectives based on geography (from authors working in the northwest, the northeast, and the centre of the province) and culture (from a First Nations author). Each article is written by a physician, psychologist, or addictions counselor who works with mental health problems on a daily basis. Each article provides a very personal perspective, which I believe is both useful and appropriate.

Our Canada Health Act states that

access to good health care is a basic right. We pride ourselves on it. In general, we provide it. But good, accessible mental health care is *not* easily available in the far-flung reaches of our province. Is the problem that the relatively small populations in these huge territories do not have enough voice to claim what we all take for granted? Is it that we, as a profession, are unwilling to bear witness on their behalf? However you pose the question, the message is the same: a deplorable situation is not being addressed. All health care providers and all provincial, regional, and federal governments have an obligation to see to the health care of their citizens. *Full* health care. Only that—nothing less—is acceptable.

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