

Important developments in the Subsidiary Agreement for Physicians in Rural Practice

The Joint Standing Committee on Rural Issues (JSC) recently announced an important development in providing British Columbia with one of the most comprehensive rural support programs in Canada.

The JSC was established to enhance the delivery of rural medical care and oversee the Subsidiary Agreement for Physicians in Rural Practice (RSA). It is a joint committee of five members appointed by the Ministry of Health and five by the BCMA, and it has a mandate to advise the government and the BCMA on matters pertaining to rural medical services practice. The BCMA is guided by the deliberations of the BCMA Rural Issues Committee, currently chaired by Dr Stuart Johnston.

By agreement, the JSC is required to conduct a review of its rural programs this year to assess their effectiveness. The programs to be reviewed include:

- Isolation Allowance Fund
- Northern Isolation and Travel Allowance Outreach Program
- Recruitment Contingency Fund
- Recruitment Incentive Fund
- Rural Continuing Medical Education Program

- Rural Education Action Plan
- Rural GP Locum Program
- Rural Retention Program
- Rural Specialist Locum Program

A request for proposals was put out to tender in July 2007 to solicit consultant bids to undertake the review. Six interested parties responded, and we are now in the process of selecting the successful bidder. As part of the review, the chosen consultant will focus on five key areas:

- Examine the strengths and weaknesses of existing rural programs—identifying key opportunities and providing a vision for the future.
- Evaluate the scope of services—determine what is working well, locate areas that need improvement, and identify any gaps in service.
- Develop recommendations on future program funding—this would include areas in which more funding is needed, programs where funding should be reallocated, and what would be the most effective allocation of new funding.
- Propose recommendations on additional programs to consider.
- Facilitate a day-long retreat to review all the data and to receive and collate further ideas and opinions to

enhance rural practice.

Consultants will consider all relevant stakeholders throughout the process to make certain that an accurate snapshot of the programs is provided, while ensuring that feedback and suggestions from all relevant parties are gathered. It is our intent that the review process will be fair, transparent, considerate of all diverse opinions, effective in providing a clear vision for the future of rural programs in British Columbia, and, at the same time, remain within our negotiated budget.

The JSC is committed to ensuring rural physicians have an opportunity to be part of this review by voicing their concerns and making recommendations to the review committee directly. All feedback will remain confidential and should be sent to the JSC via ruralreview@bcma.bc.ca no later than **26 November 2007**.

For more information on current Rural Physician Programs in British Columbia, please visit the BCMA web site, www.bcma.org and select the Rural Programs Guide.

—Granger Avery, MD
Co-chair, BCMA Joint Standing
Committee on Rural Issues