



June 19, 2024

Dear Municipal colleagues,

Thank you for copying us on your recent letter to the Minister of Health dated, June 12, 2023. Improving healthcare remains a top priority in Nova Scotia Health and for the western zone leadership team.

For us to create a world class healthcare system, it will take all of us working in true partnership. Health human resource is one of the largest challenges facing the system today and is not exclusive to Nova Scotia. We are competing globally for health human resources, and we need to work together. Communities that welcome diversity and value their health care team members are seeing successful recruitment. Community unrest and instability are not helpful for these efforts. We are committed to on- going discussion and need community leaders that attend these conversations to support health systems priorities at a local level within their respective community organization. Nova Scotia Health cannot be the only responder at these tables. More international recruitment of staff (physicians, nurses, diagnostic imaging techs, etc.) and new and innovative models of care and service delivery, are making a difference in communities. We need to work respectfully in collaboration if we are going to be successful for your community.

Nova Scotia Health in partnership with the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment leads our strategic recruitment efforts, while celebrating the uniqueness of individual communities around the province. Amid a national and international shortage of physicians, this has made it difficult to provide the service level we want. The Department of Health and Wellness has negotiated a new contract with physicians to ensure similar roles receive consistent pay. This remains important in that we do not want to advantage or disadvantage a specific area of the province. Some key elements of the contract are of relevance to your conversation, and I would ask that you review these details for a better understanding of the following:

- Shelburne is under the Community Hospital Inpatient Model (CHIP) not the Provincial Hospitalist Model due to patient acuity and volume. The daily base rate is the same for both, but the specifications are different.
- Long Term Care funding has been included in the Longitudinal Family Medicine model which has made it more accessible for physicians wanting to provide this service to sites in the community.
- ED Funding rates are set provincially, based on patient volume and acuity levels. This is clearly defined in the Physician Agreement.

Nova Scotia Health is committed to the Roseway Hospital emergency department, with the goal of providing 24/7 service. Currently, the emergency department is not open all the time due to physician resources. We know closures of the Roseway Hospital emergency department cause frustration and anxiety for the community. We share these concerns. The team remains committed to offering as much emergency services in the community as resources will support. Physicians who currently provide emergency department services at Roseway Hospital work primarily on a locum basis. We know locum physicians often balance their availability for locum service with their own practices and/or other locum commitments

elsewhere. We will continue to work with physicians to create the right conditions to make locum opportunities at Roseway Hospital more attractive.

One of the innovative solutions to our rural shortages has been the advent of the Practice Ready Assessment Program. Communities in partnership with the community navigators can make the difference for retention of these candidates by providing welcoming workplaces and communities that a family can settle and build roots within. Unfortunately, feedback from recent departures has been related to candidates not feeling welcomed or feeling Shelburne was a good fit for their family. There is a future pilot program with extending the PRAP roles into the emergency department. Shelburne may be considered for this program if they have conditions in place supportive of these physicians in the workplace and community. While it seems, there is a predisposition against these candidates, it is currently the lever we have been able to use to fill vacancies there. Without the PRAP program, the community would struggle more with access. We would be more than happy to connect you to other communities who have embraced PRAP candidates and provided an experience for them that has led to better retention.

Considering the challenges facing the system not only in Shelburne, but other parts of the province and the country, Nova Scotia Health has been focused on promoting different access to care options. We have been increasing various options within primary care as alternative access points for the community; for example, strengthened Primary Care Clinic, virtual care, and mobile clinics. We are proud of the success we have had in strengthening and building the primary healthcare team. Individuals and families living in the Shelburne community have the least wait time to be matched with a primary care provider at just over a year. Also, we have recently launched urgent virtual care in the emergency department to create additional access and relieve some pressure off the system.

Thank you for bringing forward your concerns. We know there are many challenges that are facing the health system and we're working extremely hard to address them, unfortunately some will take time. It's important that together we thank the physicians and teams that have been working extremely hard under difficult conditions for a long time. We are grateful for their dedication to their patients and commitment to provide safe and appropriate care to this community.

Sincerely,



Tanya L. Nixon  
Vice-President Operations, Western Zone  
Nova Scotia Health



Dr. Cheryl Pugh MD MBA FRCSC FACOG CCPE  
Medical Executive Director, Western Zone  
Nova Scotia Health

Cc: The Honorable Michelle Thompson, Minister of Health  
Rick Perkins, MP – South Shore  
Nolan Young, MLA – Shelburne  
Karen Oldfield, Interim President and CEO, Nova Scotia Health  
Sherry Doane, Executive Director, Shelburne Area Chamber of Commerce  
Andrea Davis, Executive Director, Black Loyalist Heritage Society  
Della Nickerson, Executive Director, Barrington Area Chamber of Commerce  
Norman Wallet, Chair, Roseway Hospital Charitable Foundation