

NORTHERN PASSAGES

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NOSM'S HEALTH SCIENCES CAMP
WALKING IN TWO WORLDS

ASTRONOMICAL SUPPORT
FOR NOSM ALUMNUS

THE HEALTH OF THE NORTH
A PROVINCIAL INVESTMENT



Northern Ontario
School of Medicine
École de médecine
du Nord de l'Ontario
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Newsletter of the Northern
Ontario School of Medicine



Northern Ontario School of Medicine
Laurentian University

935 Ramsey Lake Rd.
Sudbury, ON
P3E 2C6
Tel: +1-705-675-4883
Fax: +1-705-675-4858



Northern Ontario School of Medicine
Lakehead University

955 Oliver Rd.
Thunder Bay, ON
P7B 5E1
Tel: +1-807-766-7300
Fax: +1-807-766-7370

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Cover photo: Dr. Mary Lee Boissoneau, an Indigenous physician and NOSM alumna, encourages youth in her home community of Mattagami First Nation to consider a career in health care.



WALKING IN TWO WORLDS NOSM HOSTS HEALTH SCIENCES CAMP IN MATTAGAMI FIRST NATION

Each summer since 2006, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) has hosted Health Sciences Summer Camps at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay and Laurentian University in Sudbury. These camps are designed to encourage high school students to consider pursuing a career in health care, obtain hands-on experience, and learn about Francophone and Indigenous health and culture.

To increase opportunities for local Indigenous youth to be effectively engaged and inspired in Health Sciences Summer Camps—and therefore, consider health careers—NOSM's Indigenous Affairs Unit developed two pilot community-based health sciences camps in partnership with First Nation communities. Together, with the support of local individuals and organizations, the community-based camps held at Lac Seul First Nation and Mattagami First Nation were designed to be culturally specific and culturally safe.

Titled *Walking in Two Worlds*, these locally delivered camps provided a unique learning opportunity for Indigenous students interested in health careers, and offered a blend of Indigenous knowledge and Western health sciences to help students understand the importance of balanced education.

Located 80 kilometres south of Timmins, high school students from Mattagami First Nation travel to Timmins daily for school. For the two-day *Walking in Two Worlds* camp, however, classmates living in Timmins traveled each day to Mattagami First Nation.

The students took part in a wide range of activities and interacted with Indigenous professionals from a variety of backgrounds, in hopes of inspiring them to pursue a career in health care. Among these was NOSM alumna and Mattagami First Nation's own Dr. Mary Lee Boissoneau. Boissoneau graduated as a member of NOSM's charter class in 2009 and largely credits her family and community for having provided her with invaluable support in her path to becoming a physician.

Boissoneau says she was honoured to speak with Indigenous youth at the *Walking in Two Worlds* camp, and encouraged them to aim high, dream big, and recognize that any one of them could become a doctor, nurse, or anything they choose. Boissoneau shared stories of her unique struggles and triumphs as an Indigenous medical student and emphasized how Indigenous peoples well beyond the boundaries of her community rallied to support her. She identifies this as one of the many unique gifts that comes with being Indigenous. Boissoneau encouraged the youth to continually strive for more education and urged the students to maintain their cultural gifts, values, and identity, and to carry their culture with great pride.

Boissoneau says she can relate to the experiences of the Indigenous students attending the camp. She describes the uncertainty she felt and recognized early on that pursuing a high school education, let alone college or university, would pose some unique challenges. "I grew up in a small First Nations community, where there was one elementary



Jason Smallboy, Nishnawbe Aski Nation Deputy Grand Chief (far right), spoke with youth participating in the *Walking in Two Worlds* Health Sciences Camp and encouraged them to consider a career in health care.

school that housed two classrooms for junior kindergarten through grade eight," says Boissoneau. "There was no high school or university in our community, which can make envisioning becoming doctor or nurse feel a lot less attainable."

Inspired to pursue a career in health care by her grandmother and her father, Boissoneau fondly recalls the support of her family. "My grandmother was a well-respected nurse in Mattagami," says Boissoneau. "Among the many services she provided, she is probably remembered most for her contributions as a midwife. Although technically a nurse, you could easily say that she functioned as the community doctor and did so with very limited support and resources."

As for her parents, Boissoneau says they emphasized the importance of education and promoted it as the key to better health and independence. "I was able to see first-hand how education could turn a life around when I watched my father return to school, graduate with honours, and then have multiple opportunities open up for him," says Boissoneau. "And my mother continues to inspire me. She's still fully engaged in the workforce at age 70 and shows no signs of slowing down."

"The financial commitment of medical school is a significant challenge for anyone, however the misconception that the local band office covers education for all Indigenous peoples can be an additional

barrier," says Boissoneau. "Most First Nation communities have an inadequate education budget and are faced with the ongoing dilemma and difficult decision of who to sponsor and who to decline. They tend to have a lot of hopeful kids drawing on a small pot of funds that was not set up to support the large fees associated with someone wanting to go to medical school."

Boissoneau says it is easy to second guess yourself when you come from a starkly different background than the majority of people seen in medicine. She recalls seriously questioning her ability to compete for a seat in medical school, especially after meeting many of the applicants when she attended the admissions interview with NOSM. "I remember thinking 'How is this girl from the rez going to compete with all these wonderful, confident people?' I was certain I wasn't going to be successful," she says.

Boissoneau was one of 56 successful applicants to NOSM's charter class in 2005. Describing her four years in NOSM's MD program as "a whirlwind," Boissoneau is not shy to share that there were tough times. She describes one of her greatest challenges as finding the balance between being a dedicated mom and being a good

student. "I started medical school at the same time as becoming a mother, for the first time, to my eldest daughter, Calee," says Boissoneau. "Balancing motherhood and medical school required both support and sacrifices—especially considering I gave birth to our second daughter, Brooklyn, during my fourth year at NOSM. I am blessed to have an awesome husband and family that helped out in every way imaginable. They allowed me to be both a mom and a medical student, and I was able to complete school on time, alongside my peers."

Fast forward to today, Boissoneau remains proudly rooted within Mattagami First Nation. She now has her own family medicine practice in Timmins and is part of the Cochrane Family Health Organization. She remains a strong advocate for education and believes that education provides the best chance for improving and sustaining the health and well-being of her people.

Working with community partners to bring this exciting program to the students at the local level, it is hoped that NOSM's *Walking in Two Worlds* camps will inspire Indigenous youth to pursue education and achieve a successful career of their chosen path.



Congratulations to this year's class of newly minted Registered Dietitians who will be practising in a variety of settings upon completion of their program.



SINKING TEETH INTO DIETITIAN SHORTAGES

NODIP CELEBRATES 10 YEARS OF GRADUATING REGISTERED DIETITIANS FOR NORTHERN PRACTICE

Healthy eating can pose a challenge in Northern Ontario, where food prices can be up to 300 percent higher than in other parts of the province. With many Northern communities working to address health concerns such as obesity and diabetes, healthy eating is on the forefront of many minds. Registered Dietitians play an important role in supporting a healthy community.

Since 2007, NOSM has offered the Northern Ontario Dietetic Internship Program (NODIP), a 46-week internship that teaches dietetic interns the skills and knowledge they need for rural and Northern practice. This summer, NODIP is celebrating the tenth graduation of NODIP interns. Here are some of the many successes the program and its faculty, learners, and graduates have garnered over the years.

710+ applications over 10 years



123 Graduates
from 2008 – 2017

**4 National
Intern Awards
+
1 NOSM
Faculty Award**

74%
Working in
Northern
Ontario

7+
Master's /
MD / PhD

Graduates and Practice Settings



Percentage of Graduates in Various Practice Settings

■ Indigenous Communities (10%) ■ Public Health (10%)
■ Management / Government (5%) ■ Clinical Specialties (10%)
■ Clinical Nutrition (65%)



Community-engaged, distributed education model

3 principal sites (Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, and Thunder Bay)

84 affiliation agreements

90+ preceptors per year

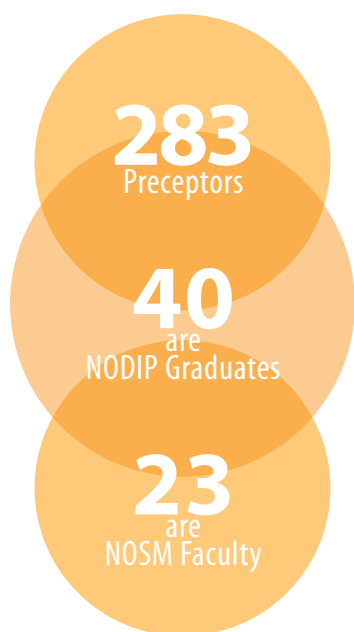
Average 20 communities per year

15 community visits per year

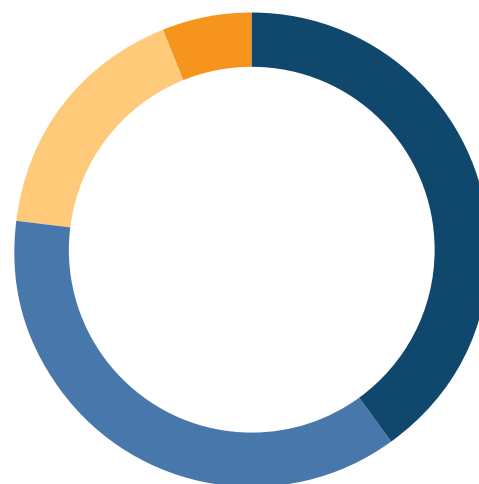
40 Communities (2008-2017)

Atikokan	Iroquois Falls	Owen Sound
Barrie	Kapuskasing	Parry Sound
Blind River	Kenora	Penetanguishene
Bracebridge	Kirkland Lake	Sault Ste. Marie
Cochrane	Little Current	Sioux Lookout
Collingwood	Matheson	Sturgeon Falls
Cutler	Marathon	Sudbury
Dryden	Midland	Temiskaming Shores
Elliot Lake	Moose Factory	Thunder Bay
Espanola	New Liskeard	Timmins
Fort Frances	Nipissing	Toronto
Geraldton	North Bay	Wasaga Beach
Gravenhurst	Orillia	
Huntsville	Ottawa	

Empowered Preceptors



Outstanding Research



65 Research Projects | 60+ Unique Advisors

■ Clinical (40%) ■ Public Health Unit (37%)
■ Aboriginal Health Access Centre (6%) ■ NODIP/NOSM (17%)

Proportion of projects by practice setting



No Ordinary Dietetic Internship Program

Since 2007, NODIP has demonstrated a commitment to improving the health of Northern communities. Graduates are trained by dedicated preceptors and committed organizations. Upon completion of their program, NODIP graduates work in diverse practice settings, serving their communities in different ways. To learn more about NODIP, view the video *Standing Tall: NODIP@NOSM*, created recently by Dr. Hoi Cheu, Professor of English and Film Studies at Laurentian University, at nosm.ca/nodip.



Dr. Jesse Zroback says the positive energy and support of his friends, family, and Northern community throughout his whole life has been astronomical.

ASTRONOMICAL SUPPORT FOR NOSM ALUMNUS

One year ago, the Canadian Space Agency (CSA) launched the fourth astronaut recruitment campaign in Canadian history. Dr. Jesse Zroback, NOSM alumnus and Assistant Professor in Family Medicine, was one of 3,772 people from across the country who applied for two coveted astronaut positions.

"Canadian astronauts Chris Hadfield and Roberta Bondar were inspirations for me to apply to the Canadian space program," says Zroback. "Hadfield used space to make science exciting for the general population here on Earth. Bondar grew up in Northern Ontario and was the first Canadian woman to go to space, and is also a physician."

Zroback says discovery through exploration and adventure has always been a passion—in fact, his mom says that Zroback has been talking about wanting to go to the moon since the age of two. This dream has enabled him to draw parallels between his work providing health care in Northern Ontario and that of an astronaut. "Being an astronaut is kind of like the rural physician who has to make high-pressure life or death decisions in remote locations with limited resources."

It's the archetype of a rural family physician that Zroback says inspired him to become a doctor. "I grew up in Kenora, where my family doctor worked in the clinic, emergency department, and hospital, caring for inpatients and delivering babies. His comprehensive practice opened my eyes to the impact one person can have on individuals and a community as a physician."

During his fourth year of medical school at NOSM, Zroback decided to pursue a residency position in family medicine. He decided at that time that he wanted to work in a rural setting. "NOSM was fantastic for previewing what a great life one can have both personally and professionally while serving in rural areas," says Zroback. "Dr. Ian Thompson who was at the time in Schreiber, Dr. Yvon Gagnon in Vermilion Bay, and the group of preceptors I had in Kenora, had a great influence on me that way."

The field of candidates was narrowed down to just 17 candidates in March, of which Zroback was one. "You're meeting a number of people who have aspired to the same thing as you throughout their entire life. They have remarkable qualifications, and they all have such great personalities," says Zroback. "What I've learned about the astronaut selection process is how important it is to pursue your dreams. It's been tremendously fulfilling to have explored this opportunity to its fullest."

Canada's two new astronauts were announced at the Canada Day celebration on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Unfortunately, Zroback was not one of the successful candidates, but the swell of support across the North for Zroback is still very real. "It's important to keep trying your best. At all stages of life, set goals for yourself and work towards them," says Zroback. "There will be hurdles, but you will learn important lessons along the way that will make you a stronger person. Surround yourself with people who are supportive of you and have positive attitudes. You may not end up in the position you once dreamed you would be, but the journey can be very fulfilling no matter the outcome."



Nathaniel Murray is one of the recipients of the NOSM Dean's Summer Medical Student Research Awards.

RESEARCH AWARDS SUPPORT MED STUDENTS

This summer, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine awarded 17 medical students with NOSM Dean's Summer Medical Student Research Awards at a total value of \$88,000. This is the 12th year that NOSM has awarded this grant to qualifying medical students. In addition, the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Toronto-Dominion Bank provided an award of \$6,000 to one fourth-year NOSM medical student.

Nathaniel Murray is one of the recipients of the Dean's Summer Medical Student Research Awards. He will be working on research this summer under the supervision of Drs. Elena Poliakova and Meghan Garnett. Dr. Meghan Garnett is a NOSM alumna and herself a previous recipient of a Dean's Summer Medical Student Research Award.

Murray says though he visited NOSM for a field trip in eighth grade, he never seriously considered medicine as a career path until high school. "During my first year of high school, I was briefly admitted to the hospital," says Murray, now a second-year NOSM medical student. "It was there where I first experienced the impact doctors have in the lives of their patients." Murray says he gained further exposure to the role of physicians during the following years by observing the medical treatment of his relatives.

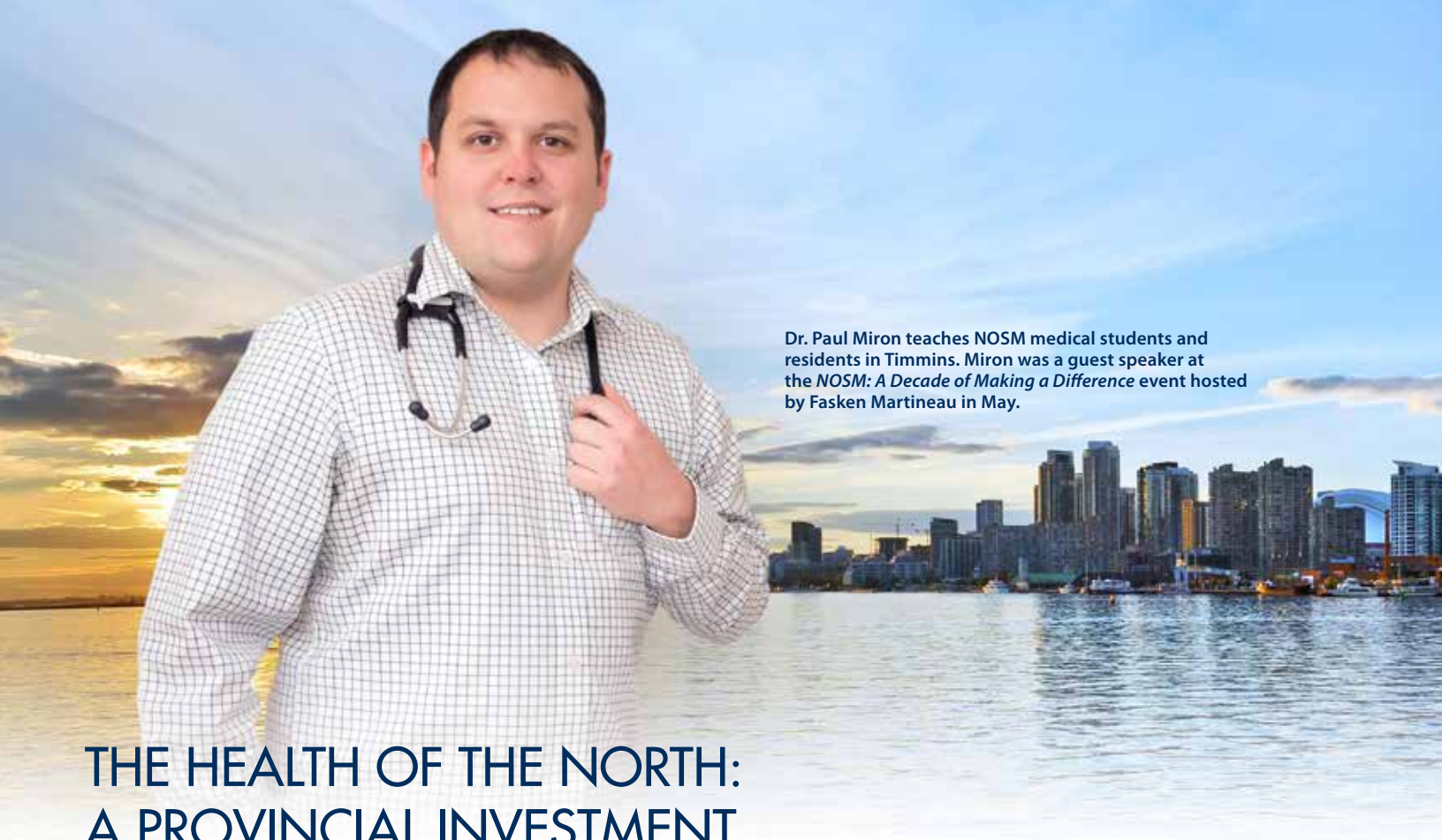
"These experiences inspired me to pursue a career in health care," says Murray. "On my path to medical school, I chose to do an undergraduate degree in nursing." Murray says his experiences caring for patients in a nursing role helped to confirm his decision to pursue a career as a physician. He chose NOSM because it afforded him two unique opportunities no

other medical school in Canada would: "I could continue living in Thunder Bay near my family and support system, and I could pursue my education and training in Northern Ontario, where I hope to practise upon graduation."

With clinical experience as a nursing student, registered nurse, and medical student, Murray has witnessed the incredible value of evidence-based practice and research for the continued improvement of quality health care. "I have always had an interest in research and a desire to be involved in the continued development of patient care."

This summer, Murray will be working on a research project titled *Thunder Limb Protocol: Analysis of the implementation of a clinical pathway for adult patients presenting to the emergency department with an erythematous, painful lower extremity*. This study aims to measure the success of implementing a clinical pathway for the evaluation and management of erythematous, painful lower extremities presenting to the emergency department at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre. Murray's role involves gathering data for the study by reviewing patient charts.

"I'm looking forward to being a part of this research project," says Murray. "While I am keeping an open mind as I gain new clinical experiences, my main area of interest is emergency medicine. The emergency department has already shown me the value of research to improve patient outcomes. I am hopeful that in the future, research will be an integral part of my clinical practice."



Dr. Paul Miron teaches NOSM medical students and residents in Timmins. Miron was a guest speaker at the *NOSM: A Decade of Making a Difference* event hosted by Fasken Martineau in May.

THE HEALTH OF THE NORTH: A PROVINCIAL INVESTMENT

Although there has been much improvement in health care in Northern Ontario over the past 15 years, there is still much work to be done. Northern Ontario is facing a broad range of challenges that require urgent action, such as the growing demand for health-care services; the need for culturally-safe health care; the prevalence of chronic disease; unfavourable social determinants of health; and, improving access to comprehensive services for urban, rural, remote, Francophone, and Indigenous communities.

Planned by a volunteer advisory committee, a first-of-its-kind event—*NOSM: A Decade of Making a Difference*—was recently hosted in Toronto at the law offices of Fasken Martineau on May 25, 2017. Invited guests heard how the wealth of Ontario depends on the health of Northern Ontarians. The people and communities of Northern Ontario make considerable contributions to mining and forestry industries, and therefore, are substantial economic drivers for Ontario's economy.

In this context, Ontario's future prosperity will rely on a healthy and productive workforce in Northern Ontario. An organization with a mandate to improve the health of the people and communities of the North, NOSM is uniquely committed to improving the health of the region—which also supports a healthy provincial economy. The event at Fasken Martineau was an opportunity to engage with business and philanthropic leaders in Toronto in the hopes of inspiring them to support NOSM in the future.

"Many guests learned for the first time of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine's success in dramatically improving access to health care in Northern Ontario," says NOSM Dean, Dr. Roger Strasser. "To date, 94% of physicians who completed both MD education and residency with the School are practising in Northern Ontario, with 33% in small communities. NOSM also contributed more than \$100 million of new economic activity to Northern Ontario in 2016."

Dr. Paul Miron, a Francophone family physician in Timmins, NOSM alumnus, and now NOSM Assistant Professor, was a guest speaker at *NOSM: A Decade of Making a Difference*. Miron says he believes that the NOSM dream is now a reality. "I was born and raised in the small town of Verner, which is halfway between North Bay and Sudbury," says Miron. "Our rural Francophone community struggled with access to health care for as long as I can remember. At best, we had a local general practitioner, but most of my years growing up, we didn't even have a physician in town."

As many in Northern Ontario have similarly experienced, Miron says travelling to see a doctor was the norm when he was growing up. During Miron's high school years, a family member experienced a medical emergency which led his family to travel daily to the hospital in Sudbury. This reinforced Miron's desire to pursue a career in medicine.



"Medical school is extremely competitive and though the University of Ottawa was my first choice, it simply wasn't in my cards," says Miron. "On my first attempt, I was offered admission at the brand new Northern Ontario School of Medicine. I must admit, I was quite disappointed. Little did I know that NOSM was going to change my life!"

Miron immersed himself in NOSM's MD program and took on leadership roles with the student society and NOSM's Board of Directors. During his third year—when all NOSM medical students live and learn in one of 15 mid-sized communities across Northern Ontario—Miron moved to Timmins. Having never visited Timmins, Miron says it was there that he met some of his most memorable mentors who have now become colleagues, and more importantly, some of his closest friends.

"There is rich cultural diversity in Timmins that truly represents the realities of Northern Ontario—a large Francophone community, as well as a First Nations and Métis presence," says Miron. "The employment sector mainly consists of the mining and forestry industries. And when it comes to health, our rates of chronic disease and occupational illnesses are far higher than the provincial averages. This is the population I trained with. This is the population I came back to care for."

Miron hopes that by sharing his story with guests at NOSM: *A Decade of Making a Difference* he can encourage others to support NOSM. "I believe in NOSM. I believe NOSM is improving

access to care, stimulating research focused on our unique Northern health issues, training world-class physicians and other health-care professionals, and improving the health of Northerners. The early data is certainly pointing in that direction."

When compared to the rest of the province, Northern Ontarians statistically have the highest rates of chronic disease and premature death, are less likely to have a family doctor, and face cultural and social barriers to care. Through NOSM's collaborations with individuals, communities, and organizations across the region, a solid foundation is in place to achieve the School's vision of a healthier North. If you'd like to support high-quality health care, education, and research that directly impacts the health of the people and communities of the North—as well as the economy of the province—please contact NOSM's Advancement Office at advancement@nosm.ca or 1-800-461-8777.

Gail Brescia
Manager, Advancement
807-766-7433



Pictured, left to right, are NOSM medical students Victoria Shaw, Maria Martin-D'Ippolito, and Charlotte Roy.

MED STUDENTS AFFLICTED WITH AN INTEREST IN GLOBAL HEALTH

BY: CHARLOTTE ROY, SECOND-YEAR NOSM MEDICAL STUDENT

On January 14, 2017, the World Health Organization declared the end of the most recent outbreak of Ebola in West Africa. Three days later, a group of medical students at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine at Laurentian University in Sudbury gathered to watch director Peter Casaer's film *Affliction* (2015). The documentary—a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) film—explores the Ebola outbreak in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea. The story starts in the remote village of Meliandou with the identification of the first Ebola victim, and provides a myriad of perspectives, ranging from aid workers to the recovered.

The movie screening and discussion were run by Friends of MSF NOSM, which is a group organized by NOSM students. The event was a quite successful, drawing a large crowd in Sudbury, as well as participants connected by videoconference to NOSM at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay. The students watching ranged from first-year undergraduates to nursing students to NOSM medical students. All were silent as they watched the powerful film.

The room was not so silent, however, in the follow-up discussion after the movie. The discussion, facilitated by Friends of MSF NOSM volunteers, explored various aspects of the film pertinent to the health professionals represented in the room—particularly the ethical principles raised by the compelling documentary. Topics ranged from the duty of care for physicians in such an outbreak, to the dichotomy of

care between developing countries and the Western world. Dialogue was lively and well thought out, with everyone contributing a variety of opinions from their diverse backgrounds.

The Friends of MSF NOSM chapter seeks to raise awareness, fundraise for MSF, and encourage others to consider working with the organization more commonly known as Doctors Without Borders. In this case, the film screening and documentary raised awareness about the complexity of MSF's work, while also encouraging health-care professionals and students in the audience to consider field work in the future. Additionally, the documentary itself lived up to MSF's mission to witness and to address issues such as 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak, which became the most widespread outbreak of Ebola in history.

While the outbreak has been contained, it is not to say that the work is done. Many students in the discussion questioned government responses, medical advances in vaccinations, and other inherent topics that might alter future responses. However, for now, the enthusiastic response from students attending the screening demonstrates that such a telling documentary was effective in its thought-provoking nature. For Friends of MSF NOSM, it is a sign that students in Northern Ontario are ready and willing to discuss topics regarding global health, and points to hosting similar events in the future.



Jennifer Wakegijig's work has taken her through a range of landscapes and workplaces. She has worked as a community nutritionist in First Nations on Manitoulin Island, with the federal government in Ottawa, and as the Territorial Public Health Nutritionist in Nunavut before joining NOSM in August 2013.

continue to address the health-care needs and expectations of the region. We are working together toward a shared goals of improving patient and population health outcomes in Northern Ontario, and a secure health workforce. We collaborate to ensure excellence in patient care, education, and research in the region and are in the process of re-affirming how we work together in various ways.

It is rewarding to see the work that is being done in the communities to advance health services across Northern Ontario, and to hear first-hand from people in other organizations about what NOSM is doing well and where there is room for improvement.

What interesting stories from your work with the hospitals might you like to share?

I am amazed at the passion and commitment that I see in executives and physicians from health organizations across Northern Ontario. I'm in awe of physicians who are able to see patients regularly while also finding time to advance the visions of their organizations. Occasionally, physicians will call in to our meetings from home after a night shift. At one such meeting, I said: "Sir, as you are joining the meeting after being on call, I can't see your enthusiastic smile. Do you have any comments?" He replied: "You also can't see my Spider-Man pyjamas!" I love these humorous moments amidst all of the strategic dialogue.

Have you made any observations on the success of the AHSCs over the past ten years since they began teaching NOSM students?

Before I came to work at the School, I didn't fully appreciate the day-to-day work that goes in to graduating NOSM-educated physicians and health-care professionals. Day after day, clinicians, support staff, and countless others focus on the learning needs of these individuals and help them advance their skills and knowledge to become practitioners. Faculty and staff across all of our teaching sites—more than 90 communities in Northern Ontario—are part of this movement we've created to build better access to health care in our region. Each of these day-to-day efforts is making a difference! I myself didn't have a physician after moving back to Ontario after nine years of living in Nunavut. I waited in the queue with Health Care Connect and was ultimately matched with a NOSM graduate!

BEHIND THE SCENES

RENEWING DECADE-LONG PARTNERSHIPS

In each issue of *Northern Passages*, individuals share a "behind-the-scenes" look at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. This edition features Jennifer Wakegijig, Manager of Special Projects with the Dean's Office, whose role with the Northern Ontario School of Medicine has her working on initiatives with various partners, including Northern Ontario's Academic Health Sciences Centres (AHSC), the Government of Nunavut, and a shared physician recruitment and retention initiative in Northern Europe and Nunavut.

In what ways does your work with the AHSCs support the School's vision of *Innovative education and research for a healthier North*?

I've been tasked with bringing together leadership from NOSM's two affiliated AHSCs—Health Sciences North in Sudbury and the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre—and health organizations from across Northern Ontario to discuss how to evolve our partnerships into the future. We are proud of what we have achieved together in the past 10 years, including graduating new family doctors and a variety of specialists who are choosing to practise in Northern Ontario.

With this project, we were told: "Don't think about what *is* or what has been.... focus on what *can* or *should* be." With our affiliation agreements now up for renewal, our partnerships can

