

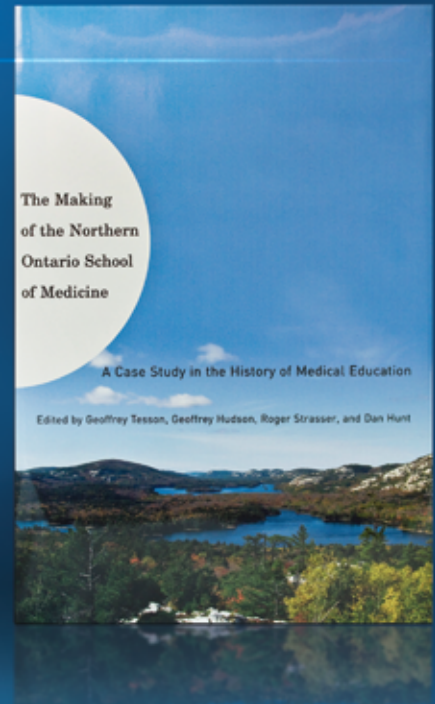


Northern Ontario  
School of Medicine  
École de médecine  
du Nord de l'Ontario  
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Fall 2009  
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# Northern PASSAGES

Newsletter of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine



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## NOSM Book Celebrates Canada's First New Medical School for the 21st Century

by Marek Krasuski

The collected works of literature on Northern Ontario has just expanded with the addition of *The Making of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine*. This hard cover text, jacketed by a panoramic vista of the LaCloche mountains near Killarney, chronicles the various aspects of the School's creation, development, and the opportunities made possible by its unique model of community-engaged medical education.

Addressed to a general audience, readers will find a comprehensive account of the School in this 200 page text, a multi-authored, peer-reviewed publication, and edited by Drs. Geoffrey Tesson, Geoffrey Hudson, Dan Hunt, and NOSM Dean, Dr. Roger Strasser.

The highly readable writing style immediately sets the framework for discussion of the principal themes in the School's growth.

The first page of the preface, for example, informs that "at a deeper level, the creation of a new medical school signaled changes in thinking about medical education that had been taking place for some time in various schools across Canada, United States, and other parts of the world experiencing problems relating to preparing physicians for practice in regions with dispersed populations. The fact that the new school started from a blank slate meant that its designers were able to incorporate many innovations into a new kind of program."

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Northern Ontario School of Medicine

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Continued on next page

From the beginning, the reader discovers that NOSM is not just any medical school, but one designed to address the health demands of rural populations historically reliant on, and usually shortchanged by, medical resources from larger centres.

*The Making of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine* is divided into three parts. The first part relates the decision making process in the creation of the new school and describes the social and geographic context of that decision. It also lays out the thinking behind a new approach to medical education. Part two is devoted to the content of the new school. It describes the development of an admissions process, the building of a new

curriculum, and the establishment of a novel governance and organizational structure. Part three reflects on some of the lessons that may be drawn from the building process and the distinct model of education developed.

Contributing author and editor, Strasser, welcomed the book as an important record in the advancement of community-based medical education, and as an historical account involving Northern Ontario communities and people whose participation was critical to the School's success. "I hope many readers will find their story here, especially the communities who, right from the beginning, demonstrated a strong interest in the School and an

appreciation for the complexities involved in creating and delivering a model of medical education that would effectively respond to community needs."

Book launches are planned for November 16, 2009 at Chapters in Sudbury, November 18, 2009 at Chapters in Thunder Bay, and December 1, 2009 at the Bay and Bloor Chapters location in Toronto. The book will be available in French in the spring of 2010, with book launches of the French version to follow. Please contact the School's Communications Unit (communications@normed.ca) for more details. ■

## NOSM Joins Forces to Present HSFO Report on Health of Ontario's Kids

by Marek Krasuski

In a tone befitting the seriousness of the occasion, John Binks of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario (HSFO) and Dr. Greg Ross, NOSM Associate Dean of Research, co-presented the 2009 Heart and Stroke Report on the Health of Ontario's Kids. The news conference held in Azilda on September 9, 2009 highlighted persistent and disturbing trends in the health of the province's children.

Obesity rates have increased to 28 percent among youngsters aged two to 17 years, partly due to the decline in the number of kids who are physically active three or more times per week. In 1999, for example, 66 percent met this requirement; in 2009 the rate dipped to 57 percent.

Several additional causes are reported in the findings, including excessive screen time on the computer or television. Children who spend more than two hours of screen time a day are twice as likely to be obese than their counterparts who devote an hour or less to such activities. The regular consumption of unhealthy (or "junk") foods, coupled with the shortage of healthy foods, resulting from financial constraints experienced by some Ontario families, are challenges which call for an integrated and collaborative approach to what has become a societal issue. The HSFO reports that if current trends continue as they are,

this generation of children will have shorter life spans than their parents. This is due to the increased risk of illnesses such as high blood pressure, type-2 diabetes, and heart disease. Representatives participating in the presentation called for a united front. "We need a unique, adequately-funded strategy that involves communities, governments, schools, and health agencies to work together to address these problems," said Ross.

Collaboration has already begun with the HSFO-sponsored SPARK initiative. The province-wide program advocates for improved access to physical activity and healthy foods, and calls for the participation of partners to create sustainable solutions to this growing health threat.

Dr. Marc Blayney, pediatrician and Associate Dean of Community Engagement at NOSM, welcomed the program as an important step in the fight against obesity. "The importance of the SPARK initiative is to reduce the obesity rate which has climbed steadily in Northern Ontario to three times what it was ten years ago. It is an epidemic, and we have to do something to stop this," he said.

Binks, HSFO Community Mission Specialist, credited NOSM's long standing participation in cooperative health initiatives, drawing particular attention to the School's influence in helping to reverse obesity trends. "What better way to get the word out there than to educate front line health providers who will pass this information on to the patients they will be servicing in Northern Ontario." ■



John Binks, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario and Dr. Greg Ross, NOSM Associate Dean of Research

# Philanthropy Alive and Well at NOSM

by Marek Krasuski

Staff and faculty at NOSM have built a reputation of supporting the School in many ways. Each year, for example, many offer their assistance during the admissions interview weekend. This year was especially busy for those who contributed to the preparations for the School's Milestone Celebrations. Still others have chosen to contribute in ways that honour their colleagues. In

March 2009, members of NOSM's Learner Affairs unit pledged funds to the Staff and Faculty Bursary Fund in recognition of their friend and colleague, Mark Donaldson. Passionate about his work, Donaldson enjoyed helping students in his capacity as Financial Aid Officer at NOSM's West Campus, where he worked for several years before leaving to pursue other ventures.

The suggestion that colleagues invest in a bursary in Donaldson's honour was well received as a fitting tribute, reinforcing Mark's desire to assist students in financial need, according to Tracy Al-idrissi, Director of Learner Affairs. "We thought it would be a meaningful farewell gesture to make a donation to the bursary fund on Mark's behalf," she said. ■

## Interview with a Physician-Soldier

by Marek Krasuski



Dr. Ray Wiss, NOSM Associate Professor

NOSM Associate Professor, Dr. Ray Wiss, is author of the recently published book, *FOB DOC, A Doctor on the Front Lines in Afghanistan*, a collection of experiences as an emergency physician in the middle of a long, drawn-out war.

*FOB DOC* is the result of daily journal diaries Dr. Wiss wrote originally as an educational record for his daughter. Popular demand encouraged the initially reluctant physician to provide the diaries to a wider audience. The book includes over 100 photographs from the front lines of the war.

Wiss' most recent three-month deployment was spent alongside Canadian soldiers at Forward Operating Bases (FOB) centered in the Pahjajawi valley, the birth place of the Taliban and the centre of intense conflict.

*Northern Passages* staff recently spoke with Dr. Wiss about his life as military doctor and soldier in one of the most dangerous places in the world.

**NP:** Why did you go to Afghanistan?

**Wiss:** I believe this is an example of a very rare thing – a moral war. I realized I would be with the people I most wanted to support – my brothers and sisters, those who are doing the fighting and dying. So when the army first called and asked for my help, it was difficult to say no.

**NP:** Most physicians are stationed at the hospital in Kandahar. You ended up in the combat zone of the Forward Operating Bases. How did this happen?

**Wiss:** The army was short a senior medic at an FOB. When they learned I was a former combat arms officer, previously worked in the developing world in a war zone, and had been a doctor with a tactical unit in Sudbury for the last five years, they asked if I would go there instead.

**NP:** As an emergency physician used to trauma, is there a difference between medicine here and in a war zone?

**Wiss:** The answer is both yes and no. Medicine in Afghanistan is like the war itself – 95 percent boredom and five percent terror. Emergency physicians in Canada are running nine hours straight. On the FOB it's quite easy to go for five days and only see a patient with a sprained ankle or rash. But when the fighting starts the roof caves in, and I have to work faster than I ever would in Canada, because I'm the only doctor there to stabilize soldiers before they are taken by helicopter to Kandahar.

**NP:** What are the toughest things to endure for Canadian soldiers?

**Wiss:** As mentioned, wars are 95 percent boredom. And there's nothing more boring than working at an observation post waiting for something to happen. And then there's combat in one of the most dangerous places in the world. Of the nearly 130 Canadian soldiers killed, three have been killed by direct fire. The rest are from IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) along roadsides. That's how we die. Each time we find a new way of detecting IEDs, the Taliban finds new ways of hiding them.

**NP:** What can Canadians do to support the soldiers?

**Wiss:** The most important thing they can do is to become informed. Canadians owe it to those of us who will bear the scars on our bodies and souls for the rest of our lives. Soldiers have no trouble with people who oppose the mission as long as their opinions are formed by an awareness of what's happening.

**NP:** Has your psychological space been affected by your Afghanistan experience?

**Wiss:** The upside of aging is maturity, experience, and psychic strength. This is my third war and I have dealt with trauma as a physician for 15 years. I don't think I've been damaged, but I have profound grief. I will cry for the losses of my friends for the rest of my life.

All proceeds from the Sale of *FOB DOC* are donated to the Military Families Fund (MFF). The Fund, created by General Rick Hillier, provides financial assistance to Canadian Forces members whose lives have been disrupted by military life. ■



## Learning in the Community: a NOSM Francophone Pilot Project

by Francophone Affairs Unit

In an effort to develop an appreciation for the role and value of health professionals and community service providers, first and second-year NOSM learners participate in weekly community learning experiences.

In the Spring of 2009, seven organizations and 10 professionals from the Francophone community in Thunder Bay welcomed three NOSM Francophone learners from the West campus. They were given the opportunity to participate in a NOSM pilot project. These Community Learning Sessions informed learners of the particular needs of the Francophone population and Francophone health professionals in the region. The spring sessions, held over a five week period, also focused on student learning and the promotion of interprofessional collaboration.

Thanks to the sharing of information, experiences, and interactive practical sessions with the health professionals, the learners gained knowledge about the primary roles of staff, the reality of working in a minority language situation, and various community resources available to practitioners. In addition, throughout their community placements, the learners undertook case-based learning which specifically dealt with Francophone realities.

The success of the project resulted in a strong effort to continue the sessions. NOSM is looking at further expanding these activities in the East Campus, as well as providing opportunities to involve Northern Francophone communities in other modules throughout its program. Ongoing efforts, partnerships and innovations support NOSM's social accountability mandate by pursuing a culture of inclusiveness and responsiveness within the Francophone communities of the North.

Since 2005, Francophones have represented between 18 and 25 percent of the student population. In addition, each class has enjoyed an increasing percentage of learners who have a range of knowledge of the French language. ■

## Apprentissage en communauté : un projet pilote francophone de l'EMNO?

par l'Équipe des affaires francophones

Pendant leur séjour à l'École de médecine du Nord de l'Ontario (EMNO), les étudiants de la première et deuxième année doivent se rendre chaque semaine dans des lieux hors de la salle de classe pour développer leur sens de partenariat avec la communauté de santé.

Organisé en partenariat avec l'EMNO, sept organismes et dix professionnels francophones, la communauté francophone de Thunder Bay ont accueilli trois étudiants au printemps 2009. Les trois étudiants francophones de la première année en médecine du campus Ouest à Thunder Bay ont eu l'opportunité de participer dans un projet pilote de l'EMNO. Afin d'offrir des séances d'apprentissage communautaire qui adressent les besoins particuliers de la population francophone ainsi que le rôle des professionnels francophones dans la région, l'EMNO et la communauté francophone ont créé un partenariat pour mieux desservir les étudiants. Ces séances se sont déroulées sur 5 semaines au mois de mars, et ont favorisé leur apprentissage et la promotion de l'interprofessionnalisme en prévision pour la pratique clinique.

Grâce au partage d'information, d'expériences et de séances interactives pratiques avec les professionnels, les

étudiants ont été informés des rôles primordiaux du personnel, des incidences du travail en langue minoritaire ainsi que des ressources convenables et pertinentes pour les nouveaux rôles de praticiens des étudiants. Au cours de leurs stages dans la communauté, les étudiants ont également suivi un programme d'apprentissage par cas qui traite de la sensibilisation au fait francophone.

Le succès initial du projet permettra à l'EMNO de continuer à offrir ces séances. L'EMNO cherche à étendre ces succès au campus Est ainsi qu'explorer la possibilité d'inclure les communautés francophones du Nord dans d'autres modules d'apprentissage tout au long du programme d'études.

Les efforts, partenariats et l'innovation continus de toutes les parties permettront à l'EMNO de continuer à mettre en œuvre son mandat d'imputabilité sociale dans le but d'être inclusif et de répondre aux besoins des communautés francophones du Nord.

Depuis 2005, les cohortes de l'EMNO ont compté de 18 à 25 p. 100 d'étudiants francophones. De plus, les classes jouissent d'un pourcentage croissant d'étudiants qui ont une connaissance du français. ■

## NOSM Staff Member Prepares to Carry Olympic Torch

by Marek Krasuski

Joey McColeman, Promotions and Recruitment Coordinator at the Northern



Joey McColeman

Ontario School of Medicine, has been chosen to run with the famed Olympic torch in hand as it makes its cross-country expedition to its final location at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, B.C.

McColeman will travel from his hometown of Sudbury to Wawa, where he will carry the flame on January 3, 2010 – day 66 of its 106-day journey through a thousand Canadian communities, including 115 Aboriginal locations.

One of 12,000 torch bearers to carry the flame, McColeman said he feels privileged to be running in the torch relay. ■

# NOSM Collaborates in New Physician Assistant Program

by Marek Krasuski

The Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) has reached another landmark in fulfilling its social accountability mandate with the addition of a new health-care program.

The School is collaborating with the University of Toronto and the Michener Institute for Applied Health Sciences in the development, administration, and delivery of the Bachelor of Science Physician Assistant Degree (BScPA). The Physician Assistant (PA) program is a full time, professional undergraduate degree based in the Department of Family and Community Medicine within the University of Toronto's Faculty of Medicine. The three institutions will operate the program under the Consortium of PA Education.

Physician Assistants function as "physician extenders," supporting doctors in a

wide range of health-care settings. Their tasks vary according to the scope of practice of the supervising physician, but typically involve patient interviews, physical examinations, preventative health-care counseling, and specific procedures assigned by the physician.

Popular in the United States for decades, Physician Assistant programs have, until recently, been available in Canada only through the Canadian Forces. The PA Consortium follows similar programs at the University of Manitoba and McMaster University, both of which will soon graduate their first PAs.

Applicants to the new program require the completion of at least 10 full university courses – including a university or college level course in human anatomy, chemistry, and physiology – and at least one year

experience working in a health-care field. Like NOSM, the PA program delivered by the Consortium is built on a foundation of social accountability, particularly to rural, remote and under-served communities. NOSM's contribution includes the provision of clinical learning sites in communities across Northern Ontario, participation in student selection, and expertise in distributed learning.

NOSM Dean, Dr. Roger Strasser, welcomed the School's collaboration in this initiative. "This is yet another occasion for NOSM to participate in the training of health professionals who will, upon completion of the program, be grounded in an understanding of the health needs of people in Northern Ontario." The PA program will commence in January 2010 when the first cohort of 22 students begins training at the University of Toronto. ■

# Huntsville Clerkship Site Opens Clinical Exam Rooms

by Sue Featherston

On September 23, Huntsville celebrated the opening of two clinical exam rooms to help support medical education in Muskoka. The clinical exam rooms are located in the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) education centre on the grounds of the Huntsville site of Muskoka Algonquin Health Care (MAHC).

The space for the centre was provided by the hospital in order to offer a complete learning and administration centre for the program. The clinical exam rooms were furnished through a generous donation from the Town of Huntsville. The facilities will be used for the teaching of medical students by local physicians and specialists, and will greatly enhance the Comprehensive Community Clerkship (CCC) program.

"Having students doing third-year clinical work here in our communities at our new space is physician recruitment at its best," says LNG member and Deputy Mayor, Fran Coleman. The Ribbon Cutting for the clinical exam rooms was attended by the medical community and a variety of dignitaries

and special guests. Congratulatory remarks began with the Honourable Tony Clement, Member of Parliament for Parry Sound-Muskoka, Minister of Industry, and the Minister responsible for FedNor. Clement, who was Minister of Health when NOSM became a reality, was pleased to see the program growing and supported by the local community.

Special thanks go to Dr. Greg Ross, Associate Dean of Research and Dr. Gerry Cooper, Associate Dean of Learner Affairs for attending our celebration and speaking on behalf of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. A presentation about the NOSM bursary program was made by Gail Brescia, Manager of Advancement at NOSM.

The event coincided with a welcome for this year's CCC students. The LNG put on a barbeque of grilled sandwiches, and background music was supplied by the Trillium Jazz band. Welcome remarks were made by Mayor Claude Doughty of Huntsville, Deputy Mayor Steve Clement of Bracebridge, and Bev

MacFarlane on behalf of MAHC. Gift bags donated by local merchants were presented to the medical students by representatives from the local Business Improvement Area and Chamber of Commerce.

Melanie Buba and Buki Ayeni, speaking on behalf of the clerkship students, closed the ceremony by thanking the community, hospital, and physicians for their support and dedication to the program. ■



LNG barbeque in front of the Muskoka Algonquin Health Centre, Huntsville

# NOSM Promotes Medical Education to Aboriginal Youth

by Marek Krasuski

Pursuing post secondary education is imperative. Such was the message delivered to Aboriginal youth in Northern Ontario by staff from NOSM and several other post secondary institutions as part of the Aboriginal Post Secondary Information Program (APSIP). During visits to the communities of Thunder Bay, Longlac, Geraldton, Red Rock, Terrace Bay, Marathon, Wawa, and Chapleau, NOSM shared with students the benefits of higher education.

APSIP is an informal group of Aboriginal Liaison, Recruitment, Counsellor, and Outreach personnel from various educational institutions throughout the province. Affectionately known as the "Roadwarriors," they present updated information about post secondary opportunities to students, teachers, guidance counselors, community members, and organizations.

Christeen Jones from NOSM's Aboriginal Affairs and Sarah Noël-Gervais from NOSM's Francophone Affairs informed their young audiences of careers in medicine and advised on the best methods to achieve success. "One of our goals is to advise youth to enroll in the right post secondary streams so they can follow the dream of becoming a doctor," Jones said.

Even more fundamental was encouraging Aboriginal youth to stay in school. "We wanted to let students know they could contact us anytime about post secondary possibilities," added Noël-Gervais. "We represent NOSM, but also encourage all students to do something positive with their lives. Pursuing post secondary education of any kind is integral to achieving that goal."

Jones and Noël-Gervais delivered the message to about 300 students from grades 9 to 12. Both were encouraged by student feedback, particularly by one youngster obviously affected by the message of an Elder. NOSM's Aboriginal Support Worker, Sally Monague, will join Jones and Noël-Gervais in three additional tours of the province to spread the NOSM message to potential future health-care professionals. 📍

# Orientation Week a Success

by Marek Krasuski



This year's Orientation Week is likely to be a memorable occasion according to the barometer of student opinion. An overwhelming majority "absolutely loved it," and incoming students described feeling like "rock stars," owing to the attention and hospitality they received during the week-long activities.

It certainly was an occasion that NOSM student, Christa Bates, will likely never forget. During a visit to the Englehart District Hospital, Christa discovered that one of the welcoming physicians had brought her into this world. Now 23, Christa is beginning a medical career and hopes to learn under the tutelage of this same physician. This was just one of many special stories that marked Orientation Week, said Associate Dean of Learner Affairs, Dr. Gerry Cooper. "We have all these interesting, bright young people coming to the medical school. When you throw them together for a week, magic happens."

This year was distinct from previous ones; a new route and travel itinerary was featured, as well as an information fair and greater participation from the NOSM community. Previously, new students traveled by bus along Highway 17 from Thunder Bay to Sudbury with stops at communities in between. This year, orientation also began in Thunder Bay, but featured stops in the communities of Timmins, Cochrane, and Englehart.

Monday's activities in Thunder Bay concluded with a dinner hosted by the School's Aboriginal Affairs unit. The next day students from both campuses flew to Timmins where they visited the Timmins

and District Hospital and the Misiway Milopemahtesewin Community Health Centre. Highlights of that portion of the trip included a moose meat lunch, and a dinner provided by NOSM's Francophone Affairs unit. During the last two days, students participated in athletic games at Laurentian University and finished the week by reciting a pledge to the medical profession.

Visits to health facilities in each of the communities introduced NOSM's newest cohort of future doctors to the vastness of Northern Ontario and exposed them to health-care environments typical of sites in which they will learn during the four year M.D. program. Orientation calls for extensive planning and the widespread participation of supporters from the School and communities. The investment of substantial resources in Orientation Week results in significant returns by nurturing cohesion in a new group of learners who will live and work together in close quarters.

"It's imperative that the School provides opportunities for the students to bond. Through the course of their studies they will, at certain times, be separated by hundreds of kilometres and, at other times, live together in close quarters during their placements. We also want them to appreciate the expanse of Northern Ontario," Cooper explained. Orientation also reinforces the link with communities whose participation is integral to NOSM's community-engaged medical education program. Highlights of the 2009 Orientation were photographed and captured on video by NOSM's Communications staff members, Dave Koski and Mathieu Seguin. 📍



# NOSM Expands Postgraduate Programs

by Marek Krasuski



The number of postgraduate programs continues to climb at NOSM. In July 2009, specialties in pediatrics and general surgery were added to the list of accredited residency programs which includes Community Medicine, Family Medicine, and third-year enhanced skills training (PGY3) for family medicine residents wishing to advance their training in specific specialties. Additional programs are in the planning stage.

All students graduating from M.D. programs in Canada must complete residency training in order to become fully-certified physicians. Family Medicine programs are accredited by the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC); other specialty programs are granted accreditation by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (Royal College).

The robust pace of growth marks growing confidence and interest in NOSM. "Acquiring additional accredited programs, particularly in a relatively short timeframe, are big steps for the School—ones that coincide perfectly with the increasing interest in Northern training opportunities" says Joey McColeman, NOSM's Postgraduate Promotion and Recruitment Coordinator.

Currently, 168 residents are undertaking training in accredited NOSM residency programs and in affiliations between NOSM and McMaster University and/or the University of Ottawa. As with learners in all programs at NOSM, residents are grounded in the realities of Northern health challenges through rotations in diverse community settings, a distinctive feature that provides direct exposure to lifestyle opportunities across the North.

A key attribute to postgraduate training at NOSM is the freedom to develop unique skill sets. Advanced skills in the PGY3 program include training in Emergency Medicine, Anesthesia, Maternity Care Enhanced Skills, and Self Directed Enhanced Skills, enabling residents to develop expertise in accordance with individual learning objectives. "We have funding available to assist family medicine residents from across the country in developing specific educational objectives. A resident who intends to practice in a remote community, for example, may choose to pursue additional skills in Wilderness Medicine or Northern and Remote Medicine," McColeman explains. These training programs are developed in consultation with the program director and the PGY3 committee which takes into consideration community requirements at the time when a resident has signed up for on going care provision.

The growing number of residency programs supports the School's objective of delivering specialty training across the spectrum of medical education. In September, NOSM Dean Dr. Roger Strasser and Dr. Maureen Topps, Associate Dean, Postgraduate Education, attended a retreat in Thunder Bay to welcome residents whose breadth of specialty training mirrors the diversity of opportunity in NOSM's postgraduate disciplines. "These residents are training to be specialists in general internal medicine, general surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics/gynecology, psychiatry, anesthesiology, orthopedic surgery and community medicine. They will graduate prepared to practice as general specialists in Northern Ontario and other culturally diverse settings," Strasser said. 📍

# NOSM Reaches International Audience

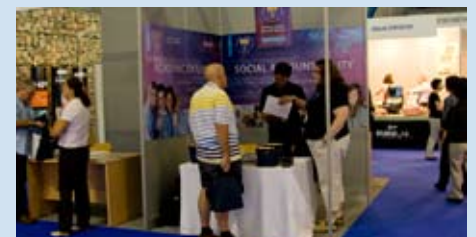
by Marek Krasuski

The Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) received global exposure at the Association of Medical Education in Europe (AMEE) conference held August 31 to September 2, in Málaga, Spain. At the largest medical education conference in the world, with over 2,300 registrants in attendance, NOSM delegates delivered presentations and facilitated various sessions.

A exhibition booth organized by staff members of the Communications Unit drew the attention of conference delegates and provided information about the School. Large display boards showcased the messages of social accountability, community engagement, community-based research, and academic excellence – all key characteristics of NOSM. Several publications and materials were on hand to promote the School, its distinct model, and the many milestones reached during the 2008-2009 academic year.

Delegates visiting the NOSM exhibit represented countries from Europe, North America, South America, Asia, and the Middle East. The hundreds of visitors to the NOSM exhibit were particularly interested in the School's distinctive undergraduate Comprehensive Community Clerkship program, said NOSM Communications Director, Kim Daynard who, along with Graphic Designer Mathieu Seguin, provided information at the display and assisted NOSM faculty with their presentations.

NOSM Dean, Dr. Roger Strasser, a presenter at the conference, spoke to the benefits of international exposure. "The AMEE conference was a wonderful opportunity to tell the NOSM story. International venues such as this one heighten NOSM's reputation as a leader in distributed community-engaged learning by attracting the interest of medical educators the world over." 📍



# Generous Gift to NOSM Intended to Attract Aboriginal Students

by Marek Krasuski

Aboriginal medical students will be the direct beneficiaries of a \$600,000 bursary, thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor. The funds will support a four-year pilot project promoting mentorship among Aboriginal learners. The donation comes as good news to Ian Peltier, Program Manager for NOSM's Aboriginal Affairs Unit, who is confident the mentorship project the funds will help to support will be an excellent recruitment and retention tool. "The mentorship initiative will help to attract and retain more Aboriginal medical students who will gain additional peer support at the School. We are very thankful for this generous gift and what it means for this project," he said.

One objective of the donation is to increase the number of Aboriginal medical practitioners across Canada. Currently, one physician serves 500 people in the general population in contrast to one Aboriginal physician for every 30,000 people.

In each of the four years, \$150,000 of the gift will be targeted to mentorship initiatives and financial assistance for Aboriginal learners. The mentorship component has two objectives. The first is to strengthen relationships among medical learners in the M.D. program. The second is to facilitate opportunities for NOSM medical students to become role models within their own communities.

Peltier says that students returning to the communities will demonstrate, by power of personal example, the opportunities that exist for Aboriginal youth beyond their communities. "Medical students returning home may, for example, organize science camps, work in local health centres, or establish basketball leagues. What's important is to have young people witness firsthand the contributions NOSM students are making, and the success they are having in achieving their goals," Peltier continued.

Little research is available on Aboriginal education and outcomes. The four-year pilot project, therefore, is viewed as a unique opportunity to collect, disseminate, and distribute the data beyond the borders of the School. A graduate student will be hired to conduct the research and report findings.

A cornerstone of the donor's philanthropy is the funding of programs for indigenous people worldwide. When it was discovered that NOSM's social accountability mandate harmonized with the donor's priorities, the School was invited to submit a proposal. Collaboration with NOSM was also an opportunity for the donor, who gives generously to international philanthropic ventures, to provide support for indigenous people in Northern Ontario. Of the decision to invest with NOSM, Peltier said, "they realized there was an opportunity to help Aboriginal people who are marginalized and struggling at home." ■

## The Thunder Bay Experience

by Maggie Bergeron, Physiotherapy Student

At 48°N latitude, Thunder Bay, Ontario sits a little less than a degree south of the majority of western Canada. It is surrounded by conifer-clad hills and rests on the northern shore of the greatest of the great lakes. Although it is remote by metropolitan standards, it is picturesque and a Canadian gem.

A colleague and I drove up from Hamilton, Ontario in a Subaru Forester packed full of boxes, books, and winter sports equipment. After eight hours on the road, we reached Sault Ste. Marie to spend the night. We got up early to tackle the 425 kilometre stretch of thin, winding, transport truck-dominated road that took us through a serene and alien landscape blanketed by a contrast-blurring layer of snow. Ten hours later, we arrived at our new headquarters: the Northern Ontario School of Medicine at Lakehead University (LU) in Thunder Bay.

The student residences aren't extravagant, but they are nice, clean spaces suited to the study and lifestyle habits of graduate

students. They were close to where we would have our classes, but on some frigid mornings, not nearly close enough. However, the frigidity is one of the characteristics of Thunder Bay that makes it a terrific winter destination. I don't know how many Canadian campuses at which you can go dog sledding and snowshoeing, but we were able to experience both of these during a LU winter festival. Another popular winter activity is the sauna—followed by a polar dip. The experience of immersing yourself in ice water after being in a box of steam could replace coffee.

With only twelve students in the Northern Studies Stream, our classes were small and interactive. This, of course, led to more personal attention and a special connection with our teachers. We were provided with many unique opportunities while studying in the North; for example, we learned about Aboriginal health from an Aboriginal community member, and we participated in many videoconference sessions. Our course coordinators also

organized many site visits and guest lecturers. This was an excellent opportunity to hone our skills as physiotherapists.

Overall, this was a positive learning experience that I would recommend to anyone considering applying. The chilly weather and the distance were eclipsed by the sheer novelty and romantic nature of this part of Ontario. Not only was it a chance to study in a marvelous part of the country, but an opportunity to create lifelong friendships.

On the drive home, three and a half months after we first set out on our adventure, the snow and ice had mostly melted to reveal to us Lake Superior Provincial Park. With its sweeping beaches and rugged hills, it is one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen. We stopped and watched the waves, encumbered by enduring pieces of ice afloat off shore. After an hour, we got back in the car to watch the park shrink in the rear view mirror. A glorious end to an experience of a lifetime. ■