

**Rooted in  
the North  
Edition**

## TEACHING TEACHERS



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

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# NORTHERN PASSAGES

Newsletter of the Northern  
Ontario School of Medicine



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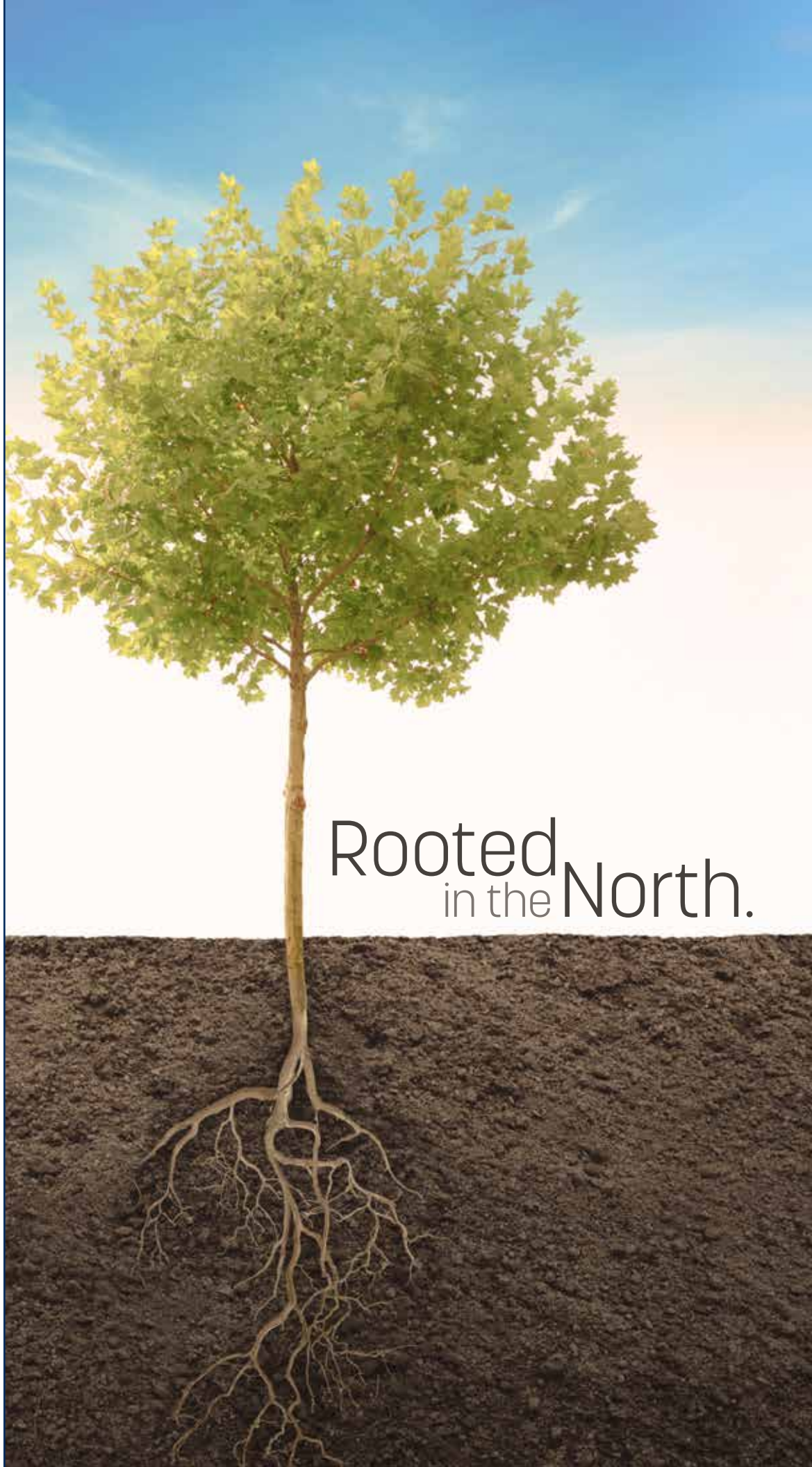


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Cover photo: Dr. Grant McKercher received the the  
2018 College of Family Physicians and Canadian  
Geriatric Society Award of Distinction in Health  
Care of the Elderly.



Rooted  
in the North.





The Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) is more than a medical school; it is a strategy to address the health needs of Northern Ontarians, improve access to quality care, and contribute to the economic development of Northern Ontario. People, communities and organizations across the North had a dream that

everyone in the region—no matter where they live—deserves access to quality health care. When NOSM was opened officially in 2005, our first staff, faculty, community partners and students tended to the seeds of that dream, based on the vision of what NOSM could become.

Over the past thirteen years, NOSM has taken root in the North. Research has shown that the majority of NOSM learners come from the North, and many stay in the North upon completion of their studies. Throughout their time at the School, they become intertwined with the ever-growing number of communities participating in their education. NOSM learners are educated in your community about the local culture, economic realities, and social determinants of health; this may be what encourages them to return to practise in the North upon completion of their education. If you have received care in Northern Ontario, you have likely been seen by a NOSM faculty member, alumni or learner. As the number of graduates has increased, so has the number of Northern Ontarians who have better access to care—from doctors and physician assistants to registered dietitians and other health professionals.

Since the beginning, *Northern Passages* has told the story of the School, demonstrating to people across the North how our roots have grown. In it, we have shared stories of the 1,700 faculty members who teach our students, of the more than 595 graduates of the MD program, of the more than 90 communities that take our learners in, of our staff and partners and donors, and of the many ways these groups have worked together to make the dream of access to quality health care a reality.

This will be the last issue of *Northern Passages* published during my time as Dean and CEO of NOSM. That's why, in the pages to follow, we're sharing some of the countless stories that reflect what we have achieved since the seeds of the School were planted all those years ago. Each of the events, projects and individuals featured in this issue demonstrate how the efforts of the people and communities who tended to those seeds are paying off.

Our roots are strong, and my hope is that *Northern Passages* has, and will continue to be, a place where we can share how all of us continue to flourish together.

Sincerely,

**Dr. Roger Strasser AM**

Professor of Rural Health  
Dean and CEO

**94%** of NOSM graduates who have completed both their MD and residency programs at NOSM are now practising in Northern Ontario.

**595** MD graduates since 2009



## AN ECHO ACROSS THE NORTH

Dr. Bryan MacLeod has seen first hand how the shortage of doctors in Northern Ontario effects both patients and clinicians in the region.

That's why when he heard the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care was looking to establish an ECHO Hub focused on chronic pain in Ontario, he knew he wanted to be a part of it.

"Chronic pain is such a common and debilitating condition, and there's very few specialists or experts, so this is one way of providing care that hasn't traditionally been available in rural communities," says MacLeod, Medical Director of the Chronic Pain Management Program at St. Joseph's Care Group in Thunder Bay and Associate Professor at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM).

Project ECHO, which stands for Extension for Community Health Outcomes, uses a "hub and spoke" model. The ECHO SJCG Chronic Pain & Opioid Stewardship Hub connects primary care sites in Northern Ontario and across the province (the "spokes")

to chronic pain specialists at St. Joseph's Care Group and the Ottawa Hospital (the "hub") via teleconferencing. In weekly sessions, members bring forward patient cases that the group then reviews together. There is also time built in for teaching on topics relevant to chronic pain and opioid stewardship.

Participants come from communities across the province with a focus on Northern Ontario, and include a range of health professions including physicians, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers and more. They work in a number of different primary care settings, and bring learnings from ECHO back to their teams.

"Our pain management team at St. Joseph's is a highly interprofessional primary care environment," says MacLeod. "In smaller communities, people might not have access to a dietitian who specializes in pain-related issues. So this is a way we can share that expertise with a wider group of clinicians, and in turn a wider group of patients."





Members of the ECHO Ontario Chronic Pain & Opioid Stewardship Hub meet at St. Joseph's Health Centre for their monthly sessions.

ECHO also allows for relationship building, breaking down the professional isolation that often affects clinicians in the North, says Katrina Radassao, a physiotherapist at Nipigon District Memorial Hospital.

"Being a new grad in a small, rural hospital, it's great to have that sense of community," she says. "When you have a difficult case, it's so valuable to have this 'expert panel' who all have different opinions and backgrounds, and can support you in making sure your patient gets the care they need."

MacLeod and his co-chairs are also working to expand the hub's offerings beyond participation in the weekly ECHO sessions, including hosting a series of NOSM-accredited evening sessions on opioid management for doctors, nurse practitioners and other opioid prescribers in the region.

In 2018,  
the Continuing Education  
and Professional  
Development and  
Faculty Affairs Unit at  
NOSM accredited 32  
conferences and 21  
programs on behalf of  
Local Education Groups.



## RETURNING HOME TO KIRKLAND LAKE

The effect of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine on access to quality health care goes beyond doctors.

Since its creation in 2007, 135 registered dietitians have graduated from NOSM's Northern Ontario Dietetic Internship Program (NODIP). Two of those graduates, Kelsey MacKinnon and Jasmine Connelly, are now practising in the Kirkland Lake area.

MacKinnon, a registered dietitian with the Timiskaming Diabetes Program North at Kirkland & District Hospital, grew up in Cambridge. Her family is from Kirkland Lake, and her parents returned to the community while she was in university.

"I had never lived in Northern Ontario full-time before I started my internship, I had just come to visit," she says. "Through my placements, I got more exposure to the communities and the way of life in Northern Ontario, and decided to try it out and take a job here when I graduated. That was five years ago, and I couldn't be happier."

She says the sense of community is one of the main reasons she decided to stay.

"Someone who's your client may also be your neighbour and you see them at the grocery store, so you're treated more like a friend or family," she says. "When a client comes to see you, the interactions we have are very warm and friendly, and I really like that."

Connelly, a registered dietitian with the Kirkland District Family Health Team, grew up in the Kirkland Lake area, and it was while she was studying in Southern Ontario that she knew she wanted to return to and work in the North.

She says NODIP allowed her to do placements in areas in and around Kirkland Lake because of her expressed interest in eventually returning to live there.

"The client population is different than in Southern Ontario, as are the resources available, and I wanted to experience that setting as an intern," she said. "NODIP allowed me to do that, and it's because of the program that I felt fully prepared me for the work I do now."

MacKinnon, who is now a preceptor with the program and facilitated one of Connelly's placements last year, adds that the





Kelsey MacKinnon and Jasmine Connelly, both graduates of NOSM's Northern Ontario Dietetic Internship Program, now practise in the Kirkland Lake area

program shows interns the day-to-day variety of rural practice, something she says is one of the big attractions of working in the North.

"When you're the only providers in the diabetes program, you're covering a lot of different settings," she says. "It's very multi-faceted, and I feel very lucky to be able to expose the interns to things like this that they may not know about practising in Northern Ontario."

She says that above all, her clients are grateful when they realize they can see a dietitian in their home community, and are often excited to see interns that are returning to the area.

"When you're in an appointment and an intern introduces themselves, you can see the clients light up," says MacKinnon. "They say things like, 'Oh wow, you're coming back home,' or 'You're giving back to your community,' and they're just very happy."

Since its creation in  
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Program.



## TEACHING TEACHERS

The Northern Ontario School of Medicine was founded on the idea that if health professionals are educated in the North, they will stay in the North.

In order to educate learners in the North, there is a need for clinical teachers in communities across the region.

The Rehabilitation Studies Program at NOSM has developed Preceptor 101 sessions to help increase the number of clinical teachers in the North. The sessions are designed for health professionals including audiologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech-language pathologists who are interested in becoming preceptors, or have experience but want to improve their knowledge of best practices.

Brock Chisholm, a Clinical Learning Liaison with the Rehabilitation Studies Program at NOSM, developed the first version of the sessions with Kirsten Pavlich in 2001, before the establishment of the School.

"We would have a clinical education workshop twice a year, but they were usually pretty advanced topics," he says. "We created Preceptor 101 based on the idea that we would consolidate all of that into a shorter session with just the new or need-to-know information."

Over the years, the sessions have evolved from a full day in one location, to smaller, half-day sessions in communities across the province.




**Clinical Learning Liaisons from the Rehabilitation Sciences Program at NOSM led one of five Preceptor 101 sessions last fall in Sudbury.**

"Considering our geography, it's easier for health professionals to attend education that has come to them, than to take multiple days to travel," says Grace King, a Clinical

Learning Liaison with NOSM and co-host of the Northeast sessions. "It makes it far more accessible, not just in terms of convenience, but also in terms of being able to take that time away from direct patient care."

In the fall of last year, Chisholm and King, along with Regan Buldoc and Cindy Davis-Maille, hosted six sessions in North Bay, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay, Kenora and Sioux Lookout.





**Brock Chisholm, Clinical Learning Liaison at NOSM, created the Preceptor 101 sessions with a colleague in 2001.**

Chisholm says clinical education opportunities, including the Preceptor 101 sessions, play a crucial role in the recruitment of learners in the North.


“The more expert preceptors we have, the more clinical placements we’ll be able to offer, and the more clinical placements, the more likely we are to recruit learners who have an interest in coming to the region,” he says.

He says the Preceptor 101 sessions have also played a crucial role in the retention of health professionals practising in these communities.

“Health-care providers in the North are geographically and professionally isolated, so attending a course like this allows them to make connections with other people, and feel that they’re less isolated and more involved in professional learning,” he says. “Teaching is also one of the best ways to maintain your skills, so having opportunities to stay current and active and involved is fundamental for clinicians.”

Davis-Maille says the sessions are a testament to the fact that there is a renewed excitement about learning and practising in the North.

“There are always lots of students interested in coming, and there are so many excellent health professionals who want to teach them and share their knowledge,” she says.



In the last academic year,  
NOSM faculty members  
taught 359 visiting learners  
and 146 health sciences  
learners in audiology,  
speech-language  
pathology, physiotherapy  
and occupational therapy.



## THIRTY YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

Dr. Grant McKercher, an Assistant Professor at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine and family physician in North Bay, was the recipient of the 2018 College of Family Physicians and Canadian Geriatric Society Award of Distinction in Health Care of the Elderly.

The award honours Canadian family physicians in active practice who had made substantial contributions to the high-quality, patient-centred care of Canadian seniors.

Many health-care professionals and community members in North Bay will recognize McKercher in that description. He has been practising in the area for the past 30 years, initially working in a solo family practice, then taking on a focused practice in care of the elderly and seniors' mental health in 1998.

"I had a lot of seniors in my practice at that time, and I also worked in long-term care facilities, so it was an area of interest right as I was starting out in family practice," he says. "Then, in 1995, I did a one-month geriatric fellowship sponsored by the Royal Canadian Legion. That really sparked my enthusiasm for working with this population, and that's when I made the decision to do an extra year of training in Care of the Elderly at the University of Western Ontario."


After completing the training, he took a job with the North Bay Psychiatric Hospital's seniors' mental health program, now part of the North Bay Regional Health Centre, where he has been for the past 20 years.

McKercher has been involved in clinical teaching throughout his career, first taking students from the University of Ottawa, then joining the faculty at NOSM in 2007. He is also the former program director of the School's Family Medicine Care of the Elderly Enhanced Skills Program.

"I think it's very, very important to be able to pass along that clinical expertise and geriatrics knowledge, because we don't always receive that specific training in our undergraduate and residency years," he says. "We see a lot of older adults in our family medicine and specialty rotations, so it's important to gain expertise in the care of that population that we will carry forward into our practices."

Since NOSM's founding and the introduction of the Family Medicine Care of the Elderly Enhanced Skills Program, McKercher says he has seen a big change in the health-care landscape in Northern Ontario.





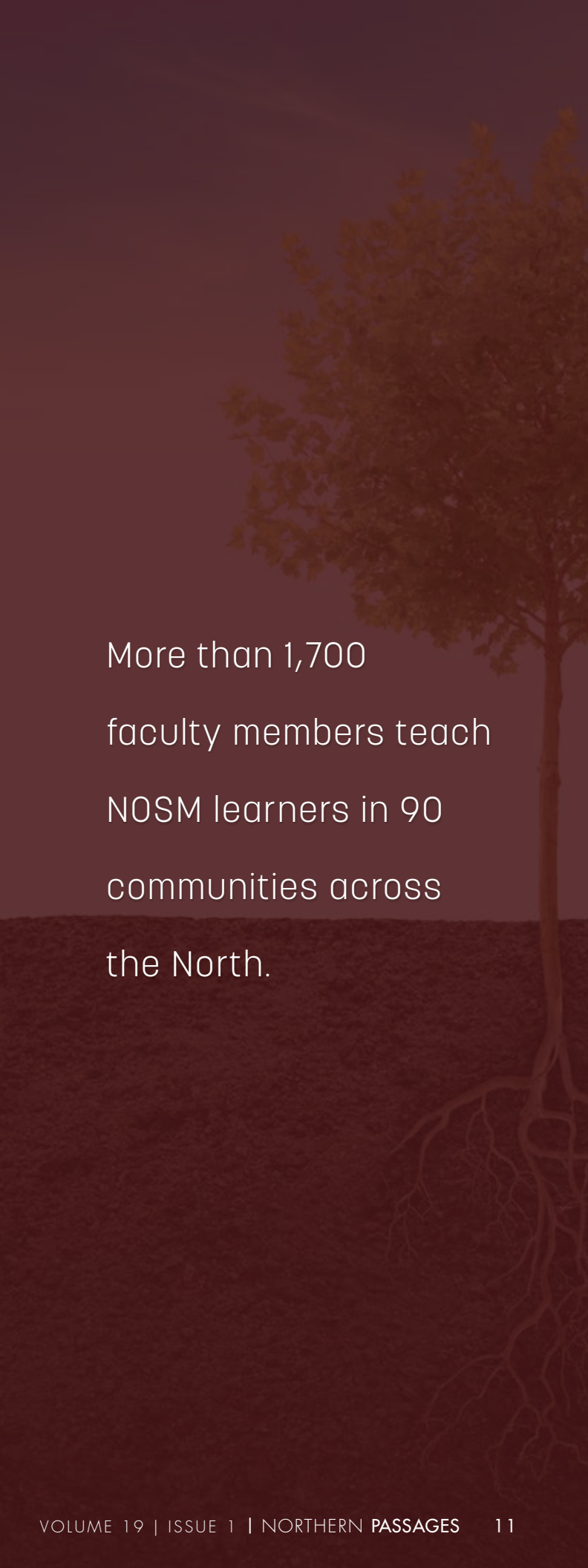
Dr. Grant McKercher received the the 2018 College of Family Physicians and Canadian Geriatric Society Award of Distinction in Health Care of the Elderly

"We've had a number of family physicians who have graduated from the program, and who are now practising in various communities across Northern Ontario," he says.

"We're developing that network of physicians and clinical resources to support family physicians and other health practitioners throughout the region."

As for his award, he says he feels particularly honoured by the fact that he was nominated by his peers and colleagues.

"A career is something that grows organically, it's a day-by-day process," he says. "As individuals, we may not see that until it's pointed out to us. Having your colleagues come forward and provide that recognition is a very special honour."



More than 1,700  
faculty members teach  
NOSM learners in 90  
communities across  
the North.



Dr. Joseph Leblanc started as Director of Indigenous Affairs at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine in October 2018.

## BEHIND THE SCENES

### MEET DR. JOSEPH LEBLANC, THE NEW DIRECTOR OF INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS AT THE NORTHERN ONTARIO SCHOOL OF MEDICINE.

**Tell me a bit about your background. What were you working on before you came to NOSM?**

I'm a life-long Northern Ontarian and member of Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory. I've worked for Tribal Councils and Political Territorial Organizations (PTOs), as well as academic institutions and First Nations charities. My PhD work was with communities in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) territories looking at the impacts of industrial forest management on their food systems, and before coming to the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, I was the Executive Director of the Social Planning Council of Sudbury. So I've been doing community development work for a very long time.

**What interested you about this role?**

What I was most interested in was the opportunity to help achieve positive community change. When I first found out about the position, it seemed to be an opportunity to be able to advance the health and well-being of our communities, and that was something that really appealed to me. It's an opportunity to be able to work in the realm of academia and help train the next generation of doctors so that they have a real awareness and understanding of the lived reality of Indigenous people in Northern Ontario, and can in turn provide culturally competent care to those people.



### **How has the experience been so far?**

The experience has been positive overall. I know that we have a lot of work to do, but I'm really thrilled that the School commissioned the Expert Panel on Indigenous Relations, and that we have their report that was released at the end of September. It's been really important to have that so that we know where we stand now, as well as have a clear vision for the direction we want to be going.

### **What do you hope to achieve in this role?**

The School is guided by our mandate to improve the health of the peoples and communities of Northern Ontario. That is inherent in our relationship with the Indigenous communities we serve, and I hope through my work as Director of Indigenous Affairs that I'm able to bring us closer to meeting that mandate. In the Expert Panel Report, I see a path forward, so my main goal is to make progress on those recommendations, and build on the work that has already been done in the interest of that social accountability mandate.

### **Is there anything you want to the people of Northern Ontario to know about you or the Indigenous Affairs Unit?**

I would want people to know that we're open to engaging with them in a manner that is relevant to their need and interests. If readers or community members have ideas, whether they are research ideas or issues or projects in their communities that they think NOSM would be able to help with, I'd like them to feel comfortable relaying that to us.

On average, twelve  
per cent of incoming  
undergraduate medical  
learners are Indigenous.



Dr. Joseph Leblanc presents the report of the Expert Panel on Indigenous Relations at a meeting of the Board of Directors in November 2018



## NEW ANATOMY LABS AT NOSM

The Northern Ontario School of Medicine recently completed renovations to the School's two anatomy labs at the medical school buildings at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay and at Laurentian University in Sudbury.

The updates, which had a budget of approximately \$700,000, were funded in part by gifts from NOSM donors.

When the two spaces were originally created, they were designed as research lab spaces, rather than true anatomy lab spaces.

"When the curriculum was first being designed, anatomy sessions were going to be conducted via online methodologies and teleconferencing technology," says Donna Newhouse, an anatomy and physiology lecturer in the Medical Sciences Division at NOSM. "When it was decided we would instead do the classes in-person, we had to create a makeshift space. This is the first time since the School has been open that we've had a space specifically designed for these sessions."

Before the renovations, the anatomy labs had centre and benchtop counters which restricted movement and blocked sightlines between the facilitator and the learners. The new labs include stainless steel tables that can easily be moved around the lab, allowing learners to manoeuvre around specimens at different angles, as well as improving the facilitator's ability to engage learners.

The lab also now features proper lighting, hands-free washing stations, stainless steel counters and cabinets for sterilization and easy clean-up, non-permeable seamless flooring and proper refrigeration storage and ventilation.

The School was also able to increase its inventory of plastinated specimens by purchasing some from the German company Van Hagan, who are world renowned for their work.

"The students have had a really positive response to the space," says Newhouse. "They use specimens in every module to learn the anatomy of all the body systems, and the updates have made a huge difference for them in terms of their learning experience."

Currently, the labs are used most often the undergraduate medical education program. However, with the updates, Newhouse says the potential for postgraduate and continuing education opportunities is huge.

"We now have the opportunity to conduct postgraduate education or continuing education and professional development sessions where clinicians can learn or practise high-risk procedures they don't get much exposure to in their residency or practise," she says. "That type of education reduces risk and improves patient outcomes."

Donors were invited to tour the spaces during Philanthropy Day events in November 2018.





**Mary Wilson (left) and Maria Bertoldo examine a plastinated anatomy specimen during a tour of the new anatomy labs.**

Mary Wilson, a member of the Catholic Women's League, which funds a bursary for NOSM students, says the new labs are a perfect example of why she continues to support NOSM.

"Being from Red Lake, Ontario, I've seen the benefits of having a medical school in the North and having the students come and work in our community," she says. "To see these labs, it's just incredible, because it's confirmation that the students are getting the best education possible, and will in turn be able to provide really great care."

If you would like to support the Northern Ontario School of Medicine and our learners, please contact NOSM's Advancement Office at [advancement@nosm.ca](mailto:advancement@nosm.ca) or 1-800-461-8777.

**Gail Brescia**  
Manager, Advancement  
807-766-7433

Since the founding of the School, the Advancement Office has awarded 3,771 student bursaries, and more than \$7.6 million in financial aid.



# PBSG-ED

## PRACTICE BASED SMALL GROUP - EDUCATION

Practice Based Small Group – Education (PBSG-ED) is a series of modules dedicated to enhancing the educational skills of busy clinician teachers. The modules provide continuing education in a case based format that makes judicious use of the most recent and best evidence available.

For more information, kindly email [cepd@nosm.ca](mailto:cepd@nosm.ca)



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