



President's message.

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We had another successful Rural and Remote Conference in Saskatoon thanks to the organizing committee members, volunteers, presenters, staff people and participants. The energy at our R&R was upbeat and more positive than ever. I personally received affirmation that rural medicine is one of the best fields of medicine in which to be. The attendees at R&R are younger every year and include medical students, residents and young rural docs. Non-family medicine specialists participated at R&R this year. This was great to see and bodes well for rural medicine.

The theme at this year's R&R was rural health access. The current federal government is focused on the environment, and rightly so. Unfortunately, rural health is not on the government's agenda. We need to remind them of the link between rural health and the environment.

Urban air pollution — of which a significant proportion is generated by vehicles as well as industry and energy production — is estimated to kill some 800 000 people annually.¹ The average wind speed can be reduced by as much as 30% by a big city. Compared with rural surfaces, city surfaces absorb and store significantly more solar radiation.² As urban populations grow, the quality of the urban environment will play an increasingly important role in public health with respect to issues ranging from solid waste disposal to provision of safe water and sanitation. With urbanization, the land is altered to meet the needs of the people who live there. This alteration of the land accelerates non-point source pollution because it changes the way water moves, increases

surface runoff and causes erosion.³ Much of air pollution is concentrated in and around urban areas, where automobiles and industry emit enormous amounts of waste into the environment. Visible smog is present in nearly all urbanized areas. Air pollution adversely affects both humans and animals, curbs vegetation growth and reduces crop yields.⁴ Urbanization leads to increased pollution and contributes to the melting of the polar ice caps. Increasing recognition of the need to supplement non-renewable fossil fuels with renewable biofuel augurs well for Canada, provided that rural Canada is supported.

Rural Canadians are being forced to move to the cities because of difficulty with access to health care. The current rural depopulation and urbanization is not in the best interests of Canada nor of the world. Canada's rural natural resources currently provide employment, forest products, minerals, oil and gas, food, tax revenue and much of our foreign exchange. In the future, rural Canada can supply the raw material for biofuels as well.

If our government is interested in the environment, they also need to address rural health.

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