

The rural scholar: Anathema or archetype?

*Peter Hutten-Czapowski,
MD
Scientific editor, CJRM
Haileybury, Ont.*

*Correspondence to:
Peter Hutten-Czapowski;
phc@srpc.ca*

Those in rural practice tend to distance themselves from scholarship. It's something that is done elsewhere, at the ivory tower. I'm too busy at the coalface.

There is something to be said for that. What matters for us is our patients and our community. This is where we ground our values and apply our skills. This is what is important for us. You can certainly do research or something similar (not everyone will hunt and fish for a hobby), but few will care if you buff your CV with a list of publications. If people do care about your CV, it will often be in dismay at the prospect that you are about to leave for a post in the city. The work of dealing with the medical needs of the community, despite limited resources, can and must remain central.

Perhaps if you are “academically minded” you should not be in rural practice. Perhaps you would be better off in the city.

However, the a priori stance that rural doctors are not suited to be scholars may be a bit disingenuous. True, publications in journals such as this one are not common currency. Still, beyond the unidimensional measure of publication count, I would propose the stance that we, in rural medicine, are precisely suited to the activity of the scholar, as we practise our art.

The scholarly questions of integration and application are particularly relevant to us. Every day we ask how (if at all) the knowledge of medicine in urban populations relates to rural settings. After all, our populations are different. The resources we have, particularly in people and their scopes of practice, are different. Rural medicine is not just urban medicine in smaller centres.

The scope of our scholarly work is more than just reviewing literature based in urban medicine for material that is adaptable for us. We are so few that proportionately many more of us are involved in hospital- or practice-level administration suggesting areas for innovation and improvement. We look at our own methods and protocols with a critical eye and draw inspiration from other institutions. The work of asking questions and finding the answers, evaluating outcomes, reflecting and presenting our findings among those in the community who need to be engaged to allow for change is quintessential academic work.

Ultimately, although work has to be disseminated to add to the pool of rural knowledge, when one is focused on the local community as we are, the work doesn't have to go far. If, however, you do have something that many others in rural practice could benefit from, please do consider publication. We at the *CJRM* are always welcoming of submissions.