I am proud to be on faculty at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM), a school at the forefront of rural and decentralised educational reform. NOSM’s success in these efforts has led to extravagant claims such as 94% of graduates practising in Northern Ontario.¹ For 6.6 million rural Canadians at the 2016 census,² this is an impressive number, so you would be forgiven to think that the NOSM has fulfilled its social mandate and we are overflowing with graduates in rural Northern Ontario. Except that, we most definitely are not.

From unpublished workforce data from Health Force Ontario, over the last 3 years, there has only been a net recruitment of eight physicians to all of rural Northern Ontario. We can account for four of those gains in my community of Temiskaming Shores, so perhaps some of us are overflowing. The claim of 94% is no comfort to many other communities in deficit, just down the highway from us. Where has the promise gone wrong?

Northern Ontario is a political construct of a carefully demarcated territory that happens to be resource driven and thinly populated. NOSM was created to deal with unmet needs for physicians in the territory and can be forgiven for putting things in a combined rural and northern (emphasis mine) lens.

REFERENCES