

Using Wisely: Our health workforce is our most valuable resource

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Choosing Wisely Canada encourages professional societies to develop a list of recommendations about commonly used tests and treatments that may need reconsideration. Professional societies are asked to identify medical interventions that are not helpful to patients in particular circumstances or may unnecessarily expose patients to harm.

The Choosing Wisely Canada Rural Medicine Recommendations were released on 16th September 2020.^{1,2} They are published in this Edition of the Journal (see page 28) and are available on the websites of the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada (SRPC) and Choosing Wisely Canada.

When the SRPC was approached by Choosing Wisely to develop a list of recommendations that apply to rural medicine, there was some reluctance among rural physicians to withhold any tests or treatments. Rural physicians continually advocate for their patients so that they receive appropriate medical services. Rural Canadians already struggle with limited resources, poorer determinants of health and access to healthcare compared to their urban counterparts. Should we ask them to do with even less?

Although 18% of Canadians live in rural parts of the country, only 8% of physicians have their practices in these areas. Rural communities struggle to recruit and retain healthcare workers from all professions including nurses, laboratory and diagnostic imaging

technicians and therapists.

The SRPC Working Group that developed the Choosing Wisely Canada Rural List of Recommendations is aware that many recommendations made by other speciality groups apply to rural medicine. Rural physicians are generalists whose practices cover the wide breadth of medicine, including office-based family medicine, hospital care, emergency medicine, obstetrics, surgery, anaesthesia, long-term care and others. However, the Working Group wanted to develop recommendations that were unique to the rural environment. Specifically, they wanted to emphasise appropriate use of our most valuable resource and our health workforce and promote care close to home.

In the recommendations, for example, we promote optimal use of laboratory and imaging staff and encourage thoughtful review of patient transfers to be sure that the anticipated benefits exceed risks of transfer and social disruption. We also recommend low urgency tests not locally available, such as certain screening procedures, be coordinated with other travel.

We encourage you to review the recommendations. They will be updated regularly, so please provide your feedback. We welcome suggestions for further recommendations!

REFERENCES

1. Five Things Clinicians and Patients Should Question by Society of Rural Physicians of Canada Last updated: July 2020 <https://choosingwiselycanada.org/rural-medicine/>.
2. News10/3/17 About Choosing Wisely Canada and our Recommendations <https://choosingwiselycanada.org/perspective/keeping-the-lists-up-to-date>.

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