

Renfrew County Welcomes Four New Physicians Through *Practice Ready Ontario* Program

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Dr. Richard Johnson is excited to share that four new family physicians have recently settled into the community and more may be here by the summer thanks to the *Practice Ready Ontario* (PRO) program.

Dr. Johnson who is the Postgraduate Director of the Pembroke Family Medicine Teaching Unit and the Clinical Lead for the Ottawa Valley Ontario Health Team (OHT), said the *Practice Ready Ontario* program is helping to bring internationally trained physicians into our area at an expedited rate, marking a significant step forward in how the primary care shortage is being addressed in our region.

Launched in 2023, the *PRO* program helps to bring more internationally trained physicians into Ontario's health care workforce by removing the requirement to complete unnecessary re-education programs.

Only candidates who meet the registration requirements and safeguards set by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) are selected to participate in the program. These safeguards are based on national *Practice Ready Assessment Standards* established by the Medical Council of Canada.

For each physician, the CPSO verifies previous practice experience through a highly structured three-month field assessment, after which a supervisory license is issued. Each doctor is then supervised by a local family physician until they are eligible to receive an independent license. This rigorous process ensures that only highly qualified family doctors are recruited to our community for a minimum of three years return-of-service.

Dr. Johnson explained that the first round of the program has been highly successful, with Renfrew County securing four out of 28 candidates in Ontario. The new physicians who were welcomed into our community in the fall of 2024 are:

- Dr. Ali Ziaee (West Champlain Family Health Team)
- Dr. Helia Ghanean (West Champlain Family Health Team)
- Dr. Salwa Alshahabi (Pembroke Family Medicine Teaching Unit)
- Dr. Hadi Nemazi (Petawawa Centennial Family Health Centre)

Each has since taken on a roster of unattached patients, primarily those who were registered with *Health Care Connect*. To register for *Health Care Connect*, those without a family physician can call 1-800-445-1822 or visit www.ontario.ca/healthcareconnect.

"This year, up to 100 internationally trained physicians with training in family medicine who have completed their field assessment will begin practicing as a family doctor in rural and northern

communities. We hope to be able to welcome some of these physicians by the summer,” Dr. Johnson said.

“We are committed to ensuring every resident in our community has access to the care they need, close to home,” Dr. Johnson said. “These successes are just the beginning.”

Pembroke Regional Hospital President and CEO Sabine Mersmann expressed her gratitude on behalf of the hospital’s health care team to the physician groups and especially to the Pembroke Family Medicine Teaching Unit for taking on these new physicians.

“Not only are these new physicians helping to ensure that more local residents have a primary care physician, but they are also assisting with many hospital and long term care home services,” Mrs. Mersmann said.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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