



practitioners are not a panacea for the problems in rural health care," said Aylward, a nurse and a former president of the province's nurses' union. "But working in a multidisciplinary practice, they can address some of the problems."

Aylward said her government has no intention of replacing doctors with NPs or of requiring nurses to work without support from doctors.

The nurse practitioners at the session called for collaborative working relationships that allow health professionals to do what they do best. Linda Jones, an Ontario NP with 10 years' experience, said her province's legislation helps clarify her responsibilities and her relationship with doctors.

"My clinical partner doesn't need to delegate responsibilities and approve what I do," said Jones. "I'm there as an equal member, not as a physician assistant. Nurse

practitioners are there in our right to offer our own style of health care."

Some of the doctors shared her opinion of what multidisciplinary practices should entail. Dr. Dale Dewar of Wynyard, Sask., has worked successfully with NPs in northern communities. "They did a lot of the interacting with patients, referred patients, handled the day-to-day work," said Dewar. "I would like to see them across the board — in cities and in rural areas. They provide the social context that physicians don't always offer."

Other rural doctors explained how nurse practitioners helped to reduce the time they spend on call by dealing with some of the cases themselves and calling the doctor only when necessary. This intermediary role is considered particularly important when someone is the lone physician in a community or region. ?

Society for rural MDs hits recruiting trail in Manitoba

Jane Stewart

The Society of Rural Physicians of Canada received a warm welcome in Winnipeg this spring when it held its first central region — Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario — meeting. The Winnipeg visit, held during the annual assembly of the Manitoba chapter of the College of Family Physicians of Canada, was designed as both an information event and a chance to recruit members for the society's central region.

The concept that led to the creation of the society was well received by physicians attending the meeting. "I'm glad to see an organization such as this," commented Dr. David Cram of Souris, Man. "It's time rural physicians were recognized for the expertise we provide."

"Suddenly there's a feeling of belonging in a profession in which we've always felt like outsiders," added Dr. David O'Neil of Trochu, Alta., who has been serving as president of the central region pending elections.

If anything was uniting physicians attending this meeting, it was frustration over working conditions and a sense of exclusion from mainstream medicine. Cram cited long hours, a tedious call schedule and professional and geographic isolation as some of the most persistent difficulties faced by rural physicians. There were also com-

plaints that their medical associations fail to represent them fairly when global budgets are being divided. "But [rural practice] still attracts some physicians because of the relationship with patients and the lifestyle," Cram added.

Among its ongoing activities, the society is attempting to develop a position paper regarding on-call and working conditions for rural doctors. Its unique rural perspective also has been incorporated into a joint position paper on rural maternity care, which was developed in collaboration with the College of Family Physicians of Canada and the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada.

The society hopes these kinds of activities will strengthen the voice of rural physicians and help them achieve their goals of sustainable working conditions for rural physicians and equitable treatment of rural communities and their residents.

The Society of Rural Physicians, which currently has 600 members, is a CMA affiliate that was incorporated in 1992. Its publication, the *Canadian Journal of Rural Medicine*, is published quarterly by CMA Publications. The society is establishing a library of rural medicine and has an electronic mailing list and a Web Site (www.gretmar.com/srp/home.html). The society's goal and task in the years ahead will be to make its members' voices heard far beyond the wilderness.