



Armed forces waves cash at new FPs

The military is pulling out the stops — and its chequebook — in an attempt to solve a worsening physician shortage. In a move that targets financially strapped residents in family medicine, the armed forces will begin offering \$80 000 lump-sum payments to encourage family physicians to sign up for 4-year stints. The bonuses, which will be delivered once the physicians complete basic training, are designed to help overcome a growing physician shortage (see *CMAJ* 1999;160[6]:889-91). The move was approved by Treasury Board in March and took effect Apr. 1.

The medical service says it doesn't intend to strip small communities of their physicians, although doctors in practice will be considered for military service. "This will be more appealing to new doctors because of the tax implica-

tions and debt loads," said Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Flaman, the physician responsible for recruiting and retaining medical officers. "We think it will appeal to people who have tax room left, and this means that the principal target will be new family medicine residents. We're definitely not trying to pull people out of small towns."

The signing bonus, which Flaman calls a recruiting allowance, will help solve only one of the military's problems. Dozens of physicians are planning to leave the armed forces once their obligatory service is up, and to retain even a portion of them will require a major pay increase. "We hope to have a new pay schedule in place by the end of May," Flaman said. Junior military doctors currently earn \$78 000 to \$84 000 a year.

MD hopes to lead Manitoba Liberals out of wilderness

In light of his recent election as Liberal leader of Manitoba and the likelihood of a spring provincial election, it looks as though Dr. Jon Gerrard will be hanging up his stethoscope and donning a suit. "I'd like to allocate 25% of my time to medicine," says the Winnipeg pediatrician, "but this may not be feasible."

Gerrard, a former federal minister of science and technology, faces a formidable task: he must resuscitate a party that has practically suffocated under the dominant Conservatives and New Democrats. There are only 3 Liberals sitting in the provincial legislature, and Gerrard himself is patiently awaiting a by-election to gain a seat of his own.

"This isn't the low point for the party," says Gerrard. "From 1986 to 1988, Sharon Carstairs [now a Liberal senator] was the only party member with a seat."

It may not be the lowest ebb in party history, but it's no zenith either. And to make matters worse, Gerrard is facing a spring in which the Conservative leader, Gary Filmon, will



Dr. Jon Gerrard: no shrinking violet

seek a fourth term as premier.

"Realistically, I've only got a few months to strengthen ties within the Liberal party and start a major fund-raising campaign to fill the war chest before I'm headed into an election," Gerrard said shortly after being named leader.

It's a tall order, but then Gerrard is no shrinking violet. He hopes to garner support from a medical community that is fed up with Conservative health policies. The government dismantled one tertiary care centre, with

the result that Manitoba now faces a severe shortage of anesthetists. "Hundreds of surgical procedures have been cancelled because of this inept attempt of the Conservatives to save a few dollars," says Gerrard.

He says all facets of health care in Manitoba will be major issues in the upcoming election. "I'd like to take a closer look at regional health authorities. The current government is still trying to micromanage the health care system by investing too much power in the RHAs." He says big decisions need to be made at the provincial level, with the RHAs playing a secondary role.

How many seats does Gerrard hope to win? "I'm not going to say that we'll form the official opposition," he says, "but with a reunited party we'll offer a viable alternative to the Conservatives and the NDP."

He points out that the Manitoba Liberals have always held a high percentage of the popular vote. "This may not translate into seats in the legislature but it indicates we have lots of supporters." — © David Square