

---

September 3, 2025

Dear Colleagues,

As we move into fall and the start of a new school year, it seems like an opportune time to discuss the importance of supporting rural medical education.

Over the past nine years, as the Director of the [University of Calgary Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship \(UCLIC\) program](#), I have had the privilege of helping support third-year medical students who are interested in learning medicine in a generalist environment. I'm proud to say that UCLIC has become Alberta's most successful rural doctor training program and readies medical students to be physician leaders who can accelerate change and improve patient care, the health of communities and the medical profession. It is work that I am fiercely passionate about.

I spent the last few weeks of the summer visiting communities across southern Alberta as part of a UCLIC tour. This included stops in Arrowood, Brooks, Calgary, Cardston, Crowsnest Pass, Claresholm, Diamond Valley, Drumheller, High River, Medicine Hat, Pincher Creek, Taber, Vulcan and Lethbridge. During those visits, I met with preceptors who had questions around the two recently introduced [Rural Medical Education Program Training Centres in Alberta](#). The Southern Alberta Medical Program (SAMP) is delivered through a partnership between the University of Calgary's Cumming School of Medicine (CSM) and the University of Lethbridge, while the Northern Alberta Medical Training Program (NAMP) is part of the University of Alberta's Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and will be hosted by Northwestern Polytechnic in Grande Prairie. [A recent story on CTV News profiled the first day of school for NAMP students](#). Admissions for SAMP are now open, and the program is expected to receive its first cohort of students in July 2026.

While I welcome the launch of SAMP, there are some concerns. During my UCLIC tour I heard from colleagues that want to know more about how SAMP will work and why there has not yet been significant and meaningful effort to build partnerships with the rural generalists and family physicians who will be the linchpins to the success of the program. Without community clinic partnerships, SAMP will struggle. For example, currently, the majority of the SAMP recruitment engagements have been housed in the hospital, with an option for community physicians to join virtually. This is not a viable option for community physicians who are already stretched thin in their practices. If SAMP wants to truly partner with community physicians, they need to make the effort to meet them in their clinics, not just virtually.

It is also important to remember that the increase in medical seats happened a few years ago. This means that when SAMP takes its first cohort of students next year, it will not represent an overall increase in medical students as the numbers simply get transferred from the current U of C class size to SAMP in Lethbridge. For this venture to be successful, there must be a true increase in numbers ASAP. The U of C has maintained an appropriate training environment since the increase in seats three years

ago, therefore, I believe the U of C can maintain this number rather than having the number of medical students in Calgary reduced to accommodate the new medical program in southern Alberta.

I have always been outspoken about the importance of training rural physicians in rural communities, and that rural medical education training must include time spent learning in a generalist environment. I genuinely believe that the future of rural medicine isn't built in classrooms. It's built in communities. I see the truth of that every day, and I bet most of you see it, too.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of this important work and to the preceptors who take the time to share their knowledge with future generations of rural and remote physicians. I firmly believe that if you are struggling with recruitment, retention and burnout, this is THE time to bring in an educational environment to your community. Training the physicians of tomorrow is THE best way to recruit, and you cannot do that without agreeing to have learners in your clinics/hospitals NOW. If you struggle with how to do this, or are first-time preceptors, there are numerous supports and conferences that can provide insight, training, tips and confidence.

Thank you, as always, for everything you do for your patients and your communities.

Regards,

Dr. Rithesh Ram  
President, Section of Rural Medicine