Why do rural MDs move to the city?

A CMA survey of 260 physicians who switched from rural to urban practice indicates that the most important reasons for doing so were educational opportunities for their children and the heavy work hours associated with rural medicine.

Both factors were considered very or somewhat important by more than two-thirds of respondents (67%). Other important factors included the availability of cultural opportunities (60%) and job opportunities for spouses/partners (57%).

According to the 2008 survey, 68% of respondents thought that the number of hours worked is the feature of rural practice that needs the most improvement. Next in line were education opportunities for children (63%) and availability of locums (62%). Another major area for improvement was career prospects for spouses (57%).

What happens when physicians do move to the city? A small majority (58%) reported they were more or much more satisfied with their professional lives after moving. The most positive ratings were for the shorter work week, with 62% reporting being more/much more satisfied with their regular work hours after moving to town. Half were happier with educational opportunities for their children.

In the survey, graduates of Canadian medical schools and international medical graduates (IMGs) showed clear differences in their reasons for entering rural practice. Over three-quarters (78%) of Canadian graduates rated their preference for rural practice as being a somewhat or very important factor, compared with 43% of IMGs. Canadian graduates were also significantly more likely to assign a high level of importance to having rural experience during training (60% vs. 42% for IMGs).

The survey also indicated that physicians younger than 50 were far more likely to have been offered a cash incentive to start a rural practice (27%) than those aged 50 or over (6%).