



# Ensuring Access to Physicians

By Peter Hofstetter, CEO

Note: The following guest editorial has been submitted to the St. Albans Messenger

As you may have heard, Dr. John Nicholson has announced he will be leaving his Primary Care medical practice in mid-2008 to return home to the Carolinas. We will miss him and his news certainly raises questions about access to Primary Care. Fortunately, prospects for a smooth transition for his practice are very good and we are having success in other areas of physician recruitment as well.

We are keenly aware of what losing a personal physician means to a patient, so are working very hard with our physicians to expand access. We are working through traditional recruitment channels as well as assisting Northern Tier Centers for Health (NOTCH) explore opening a health center in St. Albans and reaching out to UVM's Medical Residents who are considering practicing in Vermont. There have been a number of very promising developments in the past few days and I hope to be able to



announce success regarding Primary Care in the coming weeks.

I am also pleased to announce that we have just received a verbal commitment from a spine surgeon who plans to join our staff in the Spring of 2008. This addition follows the successful recruitment of:

- ◆ Dr. Jeremy Hatch, Orthopedic Surgeon;
- ◆ Dr. Michelle Sowden, General Surgeon;
- ◆ Dr. Paul Julien, Ear, Nose, & Throat;
- ◆ Dr. Meredith Monahan, Pediatrician,
- ◆ Dr. Thomas Suppan, Pathologist,
- ◆ Dr. Scott Parappeto, FAHC Urology; and
- ◆ The Hospitalists (who just extended their service to 24-7 onsite coverage).

Each of these doctors is a very positive addition as we work to ensure proper access to care in our community. Still, we cannot allow this recent recruiting success to mask the very real challenge of recruiting and retaining physicians within Vermont.

Nationally, there are many more opportunities than there are available physicians. This creates incredible competition, not only for the new candidates we would like to bring to our community, but also for our own physicians who we want to keep here in northwestern Vermont. For NMC, this means

being at greater risk of losing mid-career, established physicians. We have experienced this type of loss in Primary Care, Orthopedics, General Surgery, and Ear, Nose, & Throat.

While some physicians have left because of personal life style choices, others have left because of the difficulties of operating a private practice in Vermont's regulatory and reimbursement environment. Despite the beauty of our community and the strength of

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NMC, Vermont's regulatory and reimbursement environment can make the grass seem (and maybe be) greener in other states.

Those factors need to be addressed so Vermont can maintain appropriate access to physician care. At the local level, the NMC Board, Leadership, and our Medical Staff are looking at options to make practice opportunities more attractive to physicians. Those groups have also discussed these concerns with our local Legislators and are beginning to work with them on issues which impact physician retention. Success in these efforts will help keep our corner of Vermont an attractive place to practice medicine.

As I said, we understand the impact of losing a physician in our community. Our efforts to recruit and retain physicians continue and I am very hopeful that I will have more good news to announce in the coming weeks.