

## Country Mouse, City Mouse II: Examining Communication Barriers between Rural Physicians and Urban Consultants in Newfoundland and Labrador.

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## Abstract

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**Purpose:** Good communication between healthcare professionals is essential in order to ensure patient safety and mitigate issues caused by rural isolation. However, miscommunication between rural/remote physicians and urban specialists is commonplace. Understanding the perspectives of communicating parties is necessary in order to identify causes of communication barriers and alleviate problems.

**Methods:** Our objective was to examine perceived communication barriers between rural family physicians and urban specialists in NL. Participants will be recruited using purposive sampling until there are 16 urban and 16 rural physicians. Four online focus groups (2 urban, 2 rural) were conducted with 8 participants each. Physicians were asked to discuss previously-identified communication barriers with the other party, and suggest solutions. A grounded theory approach was used to inform the analysis of the resultant data, prompt further focused discussion, and identify main themes.

**Results:** Both professional groups perceived communication difficulties with one another. Preliminary thematic analyses of four focus groups revealed common themes related to miscommunication: available supports, contextual factors, professional relationships, and time constraints. Possible solutions included general education about rural contexts, improved technology, rural mentorship programs, and standardized consultation methods.

**Conclusions:** Rural family physicians and urban consultants in NL perceive communication barriers with one another. We predict improved communication strategies to be multifactorial, involving systems improvement and further education about communication and context-specific factors. Knowledge of these processes may help policy makers and researchers to design quality improvement strategies. Future phases of this research will use results from the focus groups to develop a communications teaching tool in order to enhance communication between the two professional groups of physicians, with the ultimate goal of decreasing

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communication-related errors and improving patient care.

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