

Health Sciences North 2026 Annual Meeting

Report from the Chief of Staff
Dr. Pankaj Bhatia

Over the past year, Health Sciences North has continued to make meaningful progress in advancing our Together For You 2030 Strategic Plan and strengthening health care across Northeastern Ontario.

This work has been driven by collaboration, innovation, and a shared commitment to improving access to care for the patients and communities we serve. Across our organization, teams have come together to expand clinical capacity, strengthen regional coordination, support the next generation of health care professionals, and reinforce HSN's role as Northern Ontario's academic health sciences centre. Most importantly, this work is helping more patients and families receive high-quality care closer to home.

One of the most significant accomplishments this year has been the advancement of regional efforts focused on improving access to specialized care. HSN has worked closely with health care organizations across Northeastern Ontario to develop a regional surgical network, beginning with expanded orthopedic surgery in Parry Sound. By sharing expertise and resources more effectively, we are strengthening access to care for patients throughout the region.

This work reflects an important shift toward a more connected health system across Northeastern Ontario. The success of these early initiatives has created a strong foundation for future expansion into additional specialties and broader collaboration in the coming year.

Across every department and specialty, HSN physicians continue to deliver high-quality care to patients and families throughout Northeastern Ontario — often in the face of growing demand and ongoing challenges related to limited access to primary care across the region. Their commitment ensures patients can receive timely, specialized care closer to home.

Supporting and growing this physician workforce remains a key priority for our organization. Over the past year, HSN successfully recruited 40 new physicians, including 23 specialists across areas such as surgery, medical imaging, and psychiatry, as well as 17 physicians specializing in family medicine. Importantly, 20 of these new physicians completed their medical training at NOSM University, reflecting the strength of Northern Ontario's medical education model and the importance of training future physicians within the communities they may one day serve.

This success would not be possible without strong community support. I would like to recognize the City of Greater Sudbury for its continued leadership in physician recruitment efforts, as well as the exceptional work of HSN's Medical Affairs team, whose dedication continues to play a critical role in attracting and supporting physicians in our region.

HSN also continued to improve access to specialized services that previously required patients to travel outside the region for care.

This year, HSN opened Northeastern Ontario's first dedicated hemoglobinopathy clinic, providing specialized care for patients living with sickle cell disease and thalassemia. These blood disorders have historically been under-recognized and underserved, particularly within African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, and South Asian communities.

Prior to the creation of this clinic, many patients were required to travel to Toronto to receive ongoing treatment and support. By establishing this service locally, HSN is helping improve access to culturally responsive, specialized care closer to home for patients and families throughout the North.

This year also brought important recognition for one of HSN's physician leaders and long-standing advocates for primary care in Northern Ontario.

HSN was proud to celebrate Dr. Tom Crichton, Chief of the Department of Family Practice, on receiving the Ontario College of Family Physicians' Regional Family Physician of the Year Award for the North East Region.

His advocacy helped establish the City of Lakes Family Health Team, which now provides care to more than 23,000 patients across Sudbury and surrounding communities. His contributions to medical education, mentorship, and the educational mandate of NOSM University have also had a lasting impact on the future of health care in Northern Ontario.

Partnerships with academic institutions also remain one of HSN's greatest strengths. Health Sciences North has long been committed to teaching and training the next generation of health care professionals, and our relationships with NOSM University and Cambrian College continue to play an important role in that mission.

This year, HSN and NOSM University worked closely together to modernize our affiliation agreement — an important step that will strengthen how our organizations collaborate in education, research, human resource planning and patient care. These discussions will help guide how we work together to meet the evolving health care needs of Northern Ontario in the years ahead.

HSN also continued to strengthen innovation and simulation-based learning through collaboration with Cambrian College. This past year, Cambrian College's applied research division partnered with HSN's Simulation Lab to develop an innovative thoracotomy training manikin designed to help physicians and medical learners prepare for life-saving resuscitative procedures. The unique simulator includes features not commonly available in existing training models, including a full rib cage, realistic chest wall and a fluid-filled beating heart.

This collaboration demonstrates how Northern Ontario institutions are working together to create made-in-the-North solutions that strengthen education, innovation, and patient care across the region.

As part of our academic mandate, HSN is the training ground for current and future healthcare professionals. Our learners are also an important part of HSN's future. By creating meaningful learning experiences and involving learners in committees and decision-making discussions, we are helping build a culture where future health care professionals feel connected to our hospital, our teams, and our communities. Many of these learners will go on to practice in Northern Ontario, helping strengthen the future health workforce across the region.

Another important contributor to HSN's academic and clinical excellence is the continued support of the HSN Foundation.

Through the generosity of donors and community supporters, HSN is able to strengthen access to highly specialized care while also investing in the education and training of both current staff and the

next generation of health care professionals. This support plays an important role in helping HSN fulfill its academic mandate as Northern Ontario's academic health sciences centre.

Over the past year, HSN's Simulation Lab in the Labelle Innovation and Learning Centre delivered more than 15,000 hours of education and training to over 2,500 aspiring and practicing physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals.

This past year alone, more than 70 in-department simulation activities were delivered — more than double the number completed the previous year — reflecting the growing impact the Centre is having on education, clinical readiness, teamwork, and patient care throughout Northeastern Ontario.

None of this would be possible without the ongoing partnership of the HSN Foundation and its donors. Their generosity continues to strengthen the skills and confidence of health care professionals today while helping prepare the workforce that will care for our communities for generations to come.

As we continue into the second year of our strategic plan, we remain focused on supporting the people who provide care every day. Physician wellness, professional connection, and recognition of excellence continue to be important priorities for our leadership team.

Like health care organizations across the province, we continue to navigate increasing patient complexity, growing demand for services, and the unique challenges associated with delivering care across Northern Ontario. These realities reinforce the importance of continued collaboration, innovation, and investment in our people and partnerships.

At the same time, we continue to prepare for the next phase of HSN's redevelopment journey, ensuring our facilities evolve alongside the growing and increasingly complex needs of the region we serve.

I would like to sincerely thank the members of HSN's Senior Leadership Team for their support, collaboration, and shared commitment throughout this past year. Your expertise and dedication are helping guide this organization through an important period of growth and transformation.

I would also like to recognize our physicians, who continue to provide exceptional care under challenging circumstances. Your professionalism, compassion, and commitment to patients and families across our region are deeply appreciated. It is truly a privilege to work alongside each of you.

As we look ahead to the coming year, we know there will continue to be both opportunities and challenges across the health care sector. What remains constant is our shared commitment to delivering outstanding care and strengthening health care across Northern Ontario.

Together, we are building a stronger future for health care in Northeastern Ontario — one grounded in collaboration, innovation, education, and exceptional patient care.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwetch.