

# “U CAN’T DO THAT”

Learn more about UBC's 10-year experience with distributed medical education - visit [www.bcmd10.med.ubc.ca](http://www.bcmd10.med.ubc.ca).

When the UBC Faculty of Medicine decided in 2002 to distribute medical education by creating academically partnered four-year regional campuses, the idea was untested. Although regional campuses were common across North America, they delivered only part of the curriculum

– either basic science education or clinical education, but not both. UBC was the first, along with the Université de Montréal, to take the leap into delivering nearly the entire medical school curriculum at regional campuses.

“Most people saw it as leap into the abyss, and figured we would fail,” says **Joanna Bates**, the Associate Dean, Education at the time. “We were told over and over again, “You can’t do that. What are you thinking?”

Soon, however, the skepticism gave way to curiosity, and ultimately to emulation. Members of accreditation panels monitoring the Faculty’s progress spread the word. UBC became a frequent host to delegations from other medical schools – in Canada, the U.S., and Australia – who wanted to see first-hand how the

Faculty of Medicine had managed to create equivalent educational experiences across such great distances.

Ten years after UBC opened the first four-year regional medical campuses, the idea has taken hold coast to coast and overseas.

**1 Northern Ontario School of Medicine** was created in 2005 by Lakehead University in Thunder Bay and Laurentian University in Sudbury. Its 256 students are distributed between the two universities, 1,000 km apart. Like UBC, NOSM relies on videoconferencing to ensure that students have equivalent experiences despite their geographic distance.

**2 University of Western Ontario** established a regional campus in Windsor, two hours away, in 2008. Western had already been running clerkships and residency programs through hospitals there when it opened the full-fledged regional campus in collaboration with the University of Windsor. It now has close to 100 first-through third-year students.

**3 McMaster University** partnered with local universities in Kitchener and St. Catharines to open regional campuses in both towns in 2007 and 2008. Similar to UBC, the combined 56 students spend a semester at the main campus, then head to their respective campuses for the next 3½ years. But McMaster’s regional campuses are less than an hour’s drive from Hamilton, so students visit the main campus for many of their learning experiences.

**5 Université de Montréal** opened a campus in the city of Trois-Rivières, 140 km away, the same year UBC opened its regional campuses – but did it with younger students. Students first attend a year-long foundational program at Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, then transition to Montréal’s program, based at the local hospital. Its first cohort of 24 medical students graduated in 2009, a year after UBC; it now takes in 40 students a year.

**4 University of Toronto** opened a campus in suburban Mississauga – not to remediate doctor shortages in an underserved area, but to accommodate more students. Given their proximity to UofT’s main campus, students travel frequently between the two sites, while also using videoconferencing to share learning experiences.

**6 Sherbrooke University** created a 24-student regional campus in Saguenay, an underserved rural area in northern Quebec in 2006. Before setting up its regional campus, the school sent faculty members to B.C. to find out more about UBC’s plans; thus began an ongoing collaboration that continues to this day.

**7 New Brunswick:** Sherbrooke University opened a 24-student francophone campus at the University of Moncton in 2006. Four years later, Dalhousie University opened an anglophone campus at the University of New Brunswick in St. John.



**8 University of Flinders** looked to UBC when it began considering a regional campus in Darwin, 3,000 km (and a whole continent) away from Adelaide. The Northern Territory Medical Program opened in 2011 with 24 students on the campus of Charles Darwin University.

**9 Wollongong University** wanted an admissions process to select students who would ultimately practice medicine in the underserved steel mill town south of Sydney. They adapted UBC’s Rural and Remote Suitability Score, which UBC created to select students for the Northern and Island Medical Programs. ■