

ALBERTA RURAL PHYSICIANS SPOUSES AND FAMILY

Be Understood Be Empowered Be a Mentor Be Taught Be Entertained Be Accepted Be Inspired Be Yourself

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Spring has Sprung! We are starting to feel the warm weather and see the flowers slowly sprouting from the ground. It is a beautiful time of year! This edition of the Hotsheet shares the news and events for Spouses and Family of Rural Physicians and features upcoming activities across the province. New this edition will be a featured “Research Corner”.

1. The Transition From South Africa to Rural Alberta – From

Dr. Magda Erasmus arrived in Redwater AB in June 2006 with her husband Dr. Francois Erasmus and their two children, Stefan and Karla. While Magda’s plan was to practice medicine in the community in the future, she wanted to take the first while in their new home and community to ensure their children were settled and happy. Moving more quickly than planned, Dr. Magda joined her husband in practicing medicine in Redwater.

The transition from South Africa was tough, at least in the beginning. While her husband went to work and her children were in school every the day, she did not have a set routine or place to go outside of their home. However, the difference for Magda was the large number of wonderful people in the community who supported and helped in the adjustment to a new life. She has made wonderful friends, and is convinced that the great amount of support available to her made a huge difference in those first months of integration into the community.

The support and inclusion that the

Erasmus family felt during their first year was further shown recently in an appreciation event organized by the Redwater Physician Recruitment and Retention committee. It was held in September, 2007 where the community physicians and their families were recognized by between 130 and 150 community members.

The first winter in Canada was also a challenge. The family had never seen as much snow as what they found in the winter of 2006/07. This has also been an adjustment, and while the weather found in Redwater cannot be changed, the Erasmus family finds they are in a similar position as many of their neighbours: they would prefer winter to be a shorter period of time during the year!

The Erasmus family’s transition to a new community in a new country again highlights the importance of community support to the process.

2. Research Corner - The Latest on Rural Physician Retention

What are the Reasons You and Your Family Stay in Rural Alberta?

Through the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary, some interesting studies are underway. Of particular interest is the work of PhD student Pam Cameron, who is currently completing her research on rural physician retention.

Cameron has interviewed 43 community members, including doctors, their spouses, staff members and community residents, from four rural communities around Alberta. Using a “strength-based perspective” to focus the interviews, she has determined what’s working, rather than what’s not working. Here are the findings...

Various professional and personal factors influenced whether the physicians stayed in the communities, ranging from workload to career aspirations, from lifestyle to the personality of the individuals. “There has to be a goodness of fit between the physician and what the community can offer,” Cameron says.

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Job Satisfaction and scope of practice were high on the list of professional factors influencing retention. She uncovered that doctors appreciate the level of care they provide to the community and they are comfortable with that care-giving.

Work, life balance is also important. Having an adequate number of physicians in town ensures that one doctor won't have to work all the time and can spend quality time with his or her family.

An additional factor that supports the retention of rural physicians is the feeling of community support that physicians experience towards themselves and their families. Cameron found that communities take care of their physicians, whether it's supplying them with fresh produce from local gardens or rallying for support to recover from a physician's house fire.

Finally, a crucial factor surrounding successful retention is spousal satisfaction and support. Cameron acknowledged that many parents appreciate raising young families in small communities, but they may consider moving or gaining a second home in an urban centre when it's time for their teens to enter high school or university.

Cameron considers rural physician retention both a social work and a community development issue. "I'm looking at community focus, relationships, interconnectedness, multiple voices – which are all very much tied to social work research and practice. It's also a social justice issue, since rural communities should expect reasonable access to health care."

If you would like to share your reasons for choosing to stay in rural Alberta please drop a note to Alberta-RPAP@rpap.ab.ca.

3. Support to Physician Spouses and Family: At the Community Level

RPAP will be providing a series of articles which focus on physician spouse and family support, highlighting various means of ensuring a physician, and accompanying spouse and children adjust to their new community without major difficulties. This particular article will provide an overview of how this is best accomplished through support at the community level.

RPAP offers support to spouses and family through a variety of programming initiatives. One of the areas of support is through our work with communities in which local citizens are actively involved in their community's physician recruitment and retention work. Research and experience highlights the importance of paying particular attention to the accompanying families of new physicians to rural Alberta. It has often been said that the retention of physicians is best guaranteed by ensuring their spouses and other family members are content in their new community. RPAP works with communities sharing the success stories and best practices that relate to spouses and family support.

Two main categories of focus that are promoted in our work with rural Alberta communities involved in supporting the recruitment and retention of physicians are 1) family integration into the community and 2) family quality of life issues. We emphasize that these factors need to be given special attention along a continuum, starting when first contact is made with a potential physician, during any community site visits the physician and family may have, right through to the actual move of the physician and family into their community of choice. Discussions with physicians and their families continuously point out how important these factors have been in their transition and adjustment to living in a new community in rural Alberta.

Family integration into the community includes ensuring an introduction to service needs, professional interests, and social and recreational programs of relevance to the family members. This may mean formal introductions to individuals and organizations which address those areas of interest, or it may mean simply being neighbourly by reaching out and personally welcoming the family into the community.

Family quality of life issues can be addressed by an introduction to those agencies and businesses which offer support to the living needs of a new family such as housing, transportation, education, banking, childcare, and spousal employment to name a few.

While there are challenges with any move to a new community, the transition and adjustment for the incoming family can be made much smoother and the memories of the first year can be made much warmer by ensuring a focus on the above areas in their introduction to the new community.

4. Website and Resources of Interest

Web Resources:
 Alberta Physician & Family Support Program and Resources
www.albertaphysicians.org
 - Physician & Family Support Program

5. Upcoming Events

Mark Your Calendars: _____ is Coming Soon!

RPAP continues to sponsor spouse/family and children's events at these events. Check the RPAP website www.rpap.ab.ca for information if planning to attend these events.

6. Tools for Planning Spousal Events

The RPAP has developed an Event Planner to help spouses more easily plan local events. The Rural Physician Consultant will support the spouse(s) in completing the Event Planner. The Planner provides a checklist of things to consider when planning for local community events. For more information or to get involved by hosting a local spousal/family event, please contact the RPAP office at 1-866-423-9911 or by email at Alberta-RPAP@rpap.ab.ca.

7. Consider a Local/Regional Get-Together for Your Area (town, city or region)

Please send ideas to RPAP for a future Hotsheet so other spouses can take advantage of the ideas for their own community.

8. Keep Informed - Rural Physician Spousal Web Pages

If you're the spouse or life partner of a rural physician, just provide us with your contact information and we'll send you periodic updates about news and events happening across the province. We do most of our communication by regular mail (post) and by email. We never share or sell our contact lists, and you can ask to be removed from our contact list at any time.

Send us your residential contact information including name, address, postal code, home phone, fax, and email address:

- By email: Alberta-RPAP@rpap.ab.ca;
- By phone: 780-423-9911 or toll-free at 1-866-423-9911;
- By fax: 780-423-9917.

Keep informed of activities related to spouse and family programs and rural lifestyle through The Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan website: www.rpap.ab.ca.

For more information about the Rural Physician Spousal and Family Programming, contact:

RPAP:
1-866-423-9911
or by email:
Alberta-RPAP@rpap.ab.ca

Or contact the Rural Physician Consultant in your area:

South: Monica Kohlhammer
T: 403-283-1480
or email:
monica.kohlhammer@rpap.ab.ca

North: Rebekah Seidel
T: 403- 843-4879
or email
rebekah.seidel@rpap.ab.ca

Rural Physician Spousal and Family Programming is sponsored by The Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan. Its mission is to “promote the retention of rural physicians in Alberta through spousal and family networking, communication and programs that foster personal growth and satisfaction with rural living.”