



Grade 1 students participated in the Doctor for a Day program at Lamont Health Care Centre.

White coat fever hit the community of Lamont in February, but there was no need to panic.

Forty Grade 1 students donned the quintessential physician's white uniform during a Doctor for a Day initiative at Lamont Health Care Centre.

The event was arranged by the area's Rural Health Committee, an attraction and retention committee recently established with support from RhPAP to encourage health professionals to work in the community.

"It was good, it was fun," says Linda Mills, who represents the hospital board on the

committee.

“Everybody who was involved stepped up to the plate. Those kids were so inquisitive. There wasn’t one kid crawling on the floor or turning circles. They were just entranced.”

Mills got the idea for Doctor for a Day after attending RhPAP’s 2024 Rural Community Conference in Wainwright. There, Dr. Sam Ogbeide spoke about how his community invited young students to experience healthcare in a non-threatening environment and even plant a seed for them to become health professionals in the Killam area down the road.



It takes a community to organize a field trip for 40 Grade 1 students. Linda Mills, centre, is shown with fellow Lamont Hospital Board member, Trudy Harrold, and Denise Warawa, director of care at the hospital. Collaboration between Lamont Elementary School, Lamont Health Care Centre, Elk Island Public Schools, and the Town of Lamont worked so well that the Rural Health Committee is already talking about doing it again next year.

Mills was intrigued. She saw the potential in hosting a similar event. As a foster mom to a Grade 3 student, she understood the influence a non-vulnerable event could have on children.

“It’s a time when they can go (to the hospital) when it’s a positive experience. They’re not going when someone’s ill, maybe in their family, or themselves,” she explains.

“They are going to be OK to go to the hospital if they break their leg or whatever,” says Mills. “I think that they will have a sense of belonging, now they know the whole hospital.”



Two students are all smiles after learning that hospitals are friendly, safe places to visit.

Students learned about the emergency department, visited the medical clinic, enjoyed a snack in the cafeteria, experienced paperwork with administration, and interacted and sang for continuing care and long-term care residents. Many had questions for the health professionals, while others were able to pick up a stethoscope and listen to a heartbeat during the two-hour long field trip.

While some students may strive to become doctors, others may be more interested in other roles such as recreational therapy, nursing, maintenance, food service, or other health-related careers.

“There are lots of jobs in a hospital, not just the health professionals,” says Mills, noting the Lamont hospital is the largest employer in Lamont County. The hospital is unique in that it’s the only United Church-affiliated hospital operating in Canada today.

Mills, who has been on the hospital board for 20 years, is always recruiting volunteers in grades 11 and 12 through the school’s work experience program.



Dr. Muhammad Alam speaks to a resident, playing the role of a patient, as part of the Doctor for a Day program. Grade 1 students helped Dr. Alam with his mock diagnosis.

She is proud of how the initiative turned out and credits buy-in from her committee and collaboration with the Elk Island School Division, of which Lamont is a part. Mills hopes other students will have a similar opportunity in other districts.

“We wanted them to be able to come into the hospital, whether it was for themselves or to come and visit grandma or grandpa, with no fear at all.

“We achieved that goal as you could see those kids on the way out. They were just fine. They will never have a fear of going into a hospital.”