

As far as health workforce attraction and retention committees go, Peace Regional Healthcare Attraction and Retention Committee (PRHARC) is just a youngster.

Now in its fourth year, PRHARC plays an important role in attracting and retaining physicians and other health professionals to Peace River.

Dr. Karen Lundgard is the Community Medical Director for Peace River and part of her role involves recruiting new physicians.

While her team is able to show new recruits the “work” opportunities in Peace River, she counts on PRHARC to show prospective physicians and their families the opportunities to “live” and “play” in the community.



Dr. Karen Lundgard checks the breathing of a patient at the Peace River Medical Clinic.

“Prior to having [PRHARC], recruitment was all done by physicians,” explained Dr.

Lundgard. “[PRHARC] lessened the load on the physicians, and actually made the recruits feel more welcome from a community perspective.”

It’s a very welcoming community - Dr. Adam Mildenberger, Peace River family physician

Elaine Manzer chairs the committee.

“When we are told that there is a prospective physician coming to town, we try to host a lunch for them...,” Manzer said.

“One of our real estate people in town has been very good about touring them around the area and providing that local commentary.”

Deciding whether you want to live in a community means deciding what are you going to do when you are not working - Dr. Kathryn Wood, Peace River family physician

Dr. Adam Mildenberger and his spouse, Dr. Kathryn Wood, are Canadian-trained physicians. They both came to Peace River to practise after previously completing their Rural Integrated Community Clerkship (ICC) and medical residency in Peace River. A Rural ICC provides third-year medical students with 42 weeks of continuous patient care, preceptor supervision, and learning experiences in a rural community.



Both Dr. Kathryn Wood and her husband, Dr. Adam Mildenberger practise in Peace River. Dr. Wood is originally from Edmonton. Dr. Mildenberger is from Beaverlodge.

“It’s a very welcoming community,” said Dr. Mildenberger. “I remember as an ICC student playing on the basketball team. My wife went to a book club.”

He says those opportunities made Peace River feel more like home than just a place to work.

“Deciding whether you want to live in a community means deciding what are you going to do when you are not working,” says Dr. Wood.

“Are there things to do outdoors? Do you feel like the community is welcoming? Are there extracurricular activities that you can get involved in? ...I know Peace River in particular, has always been a community that really works hard to include both the physician and their family in things around the community.”

The members of PRHARC know that it’s just as critical to show the health professional’s

family what the community has to offer, as it is to show the health professional.

It's a beautiful town to live in, and there are lots of recreational opportunities right in town - Dr. Karen Neupane, Peace River family physician

Dr. Karen Lundgard added: "It's often the spouse-if they have a spouse-that we need to sell on the town, and the lifestyle, and the community. To me, that's much more important than just selling the physician, because [the physician] can have the same practice in 10 different communities in Alberta."

Dr. Karen Neupane is also a Canadian-trained physician. Workwise, she was drawn to Peace River by the mentorship provided by other physicians, especially in surgery and emergency medicine. She also liked being able to practise to full scope.



Dr. Karen Neupane sees a child and her mother at the Peace River Medical Clinic.

Outside of work, Dr. Neupane and her husband Pradeep, a registered nurse, love getting outdoors in the Peace Region.

“It’s a beautiful town to live in, and there are lots of recreational opportunities right in town,” said Dr. Neupane. “It’s easy to go out for a run. There’s a big hill right behind my house that I can run up. We have a canoe, so we’re exploring local canoeing opportunities.

PRHARC makes a point of welcoming new physicians when they first arrive.

[New physicians] get this lovely welcome basket that’s full of goodies and fruit -
Lana deBoon, clinic manager, Peace River Medical Clinic

Lana deBoon is the clinic manager at Peace River Medical Clinic. She assists Dr. Lundgard in recruiting new physicians.

“[New] physicians are often arriving. ... They’re busy, and they’re unpacking, and they get this lovely welcome basket that’s full of goodies and fruit,” deBoon explained. “Things like that just make life a little bit easier in those first couple of days. We find that’s something that the physicians coming to Peace River have really enjoyed.”

“They definitely helped us feel welcome,” adds Dr. Wood.

Health professional retention is also paramount. Pre-COVID, PRHARC hosted an annual appreciation barbecue for their local health-care providers.

PRHARC includes members from five different local governments: the MD of Peace, the Counties of Northern Lights and Northern Sunrise, the Village of Nampa, and the Town of Peace River. They meet four times a year, lately on Zoom, and they all get along well.

“We’re all neighbours,” says PRHARC member Dan Boisvert. “We know each other. We meet on other committees. It’s really a fun committee to be on.”

It’s really cool to come somewhere like Peace River where I’ve never been before
- Julie Munich, 2nd year medical student, University of Alberta

One of PRHARC's biggest accomplishments was organizing an RhPAP-sponsored post-secondary skills weekend for health professional students from Edmonton and Grande Prairie. Many of the students had never been exposed to the rural lifestyle before.

They visited a dairy farm and an air ambulance hangar. They also hiked along the Peace River, checked out the statue of gold mining legend "[12-footDavis](#)" and jumped on Peace River's legendary Bouncy Pillow.

PRHARC organized a delicious community dinner for the students, as well as a lively night of entertainment in the local theatre.

"It's really cool to come somewhere like Peace River where I've never been before," says second-year medicine student Julie Munich. "It's really fun to meet the community and see how much the community has come together to show us how amazing it is here."

PRHARC has successfully nominated two previous RhPAP Rhapsody Award recipients: the [Operating Room Nursing Team at the Peace River Community Health Centre](#), and [Dr. David Welch](#), a family physician.

Now it's PRHARC's turn for accolades on their successful efforts to keep healthcare close to home in their area.

Congratulations to the Peace Regional Healthcare Attraction and Retention Committee, recipients of the 2020 RhPAP Rhapsody Community Award.