



Dr. Babatunde Awakan, RhPAP's newest board member, is shown with his wife, Seyi, and their sons Fola and Jimi, and daughters, Banke and Feyio. — Photo supplied by Dr. Babatunde Awakan

Very few people can link their career path to a dog bite.

For Dr. Babatunde Awakan, RhPAP's newest board member, this unexpected event sparked

a lifelong commitment to medicine.

At 11-years-old, Dr. Awakan experienced a traumatic dog bite, requiring a daunting 21-day course of injections for rabies.

“Going to the doctor’s office was scary,” he recalls. However, Dr. Awakan remembers growing more comfortable with the health professionals each time he returned for treatment.

The experience ignited his curiosity in pursuing a health profession. With encouragement from his parents, he eventually enrolled in medical school in his native Nigeria. He later moved to South Africa where he completed his residency and was exposed to rural medicine.

Eighteen years ago, Dr. Awakan applied to practise in Two Hills, Alberta, a community about an hour and a half northeast of Edmonton.

Having grown up in the Nigerian city of Lagos, with a population of 2.5 million at the time, his first impression of Canada was how quiet and laid back the Edmonton airport and its surroundings appeared.

“I was surprised it was an international airport,” Dr. Awakan recalls thinking when he first visited the area.

“It didn’t seem busy, so in my mind, I thought, ‘This was a place you can grow with, an emerging city.’ I’ve been to other cities, and they were congested and busy. I was here for about a week, and I enjoyed it.”

Dr. Awakan immigrated to Canada the next year with his wife and young son. Instead of being posted to Two Hills, he ended up in Camrose after the health region at the time deemed his obstetric experience would be a better fit for the community located one hour southeast of Edmonton.

Since then, he’s built a strong rapport with his patients.

“Over time they have become like family,” he says of his panel of about 2,000 patients.

“That’s the beauty of family medicine; you develop a relationship. You know these patients, you know their children, you know their grandchildren, and everybody is kind of interconnected in one way or the other.

“It’s a privilege to be involved in the care of another human being.”



Dr. Babatunde Awakan meets with one of his patients, Karen Wold, in his Camrose

clinic. Dr. Awakan says rural practices are fulfilling as physicians get to know their patients and their families while working to their full scope.

— Photo supplied by Dr. Babatunde Awakan

Dr. Awakan no longer works in obstetrics, but he carries out the quintessential rural physician responsibilities of emergency shifts, long-term care coverage, and regular clinic hours. He started his new role with RhPAP late last year after being appointed as one of two members representing the Alberta Medical Association.

While Camrose is a mid-sized community of about 20,000 people, Dr. Awakan maintains finding doctors is still challenging. He empathizes with smaller rural and remote communities having shared experiences with colleagues practising in those areas. He also believes patients in rural Alberta deserve timely access to healthcare resources.

He has worked with the Camrose Retention and Recruitment Committee to promote the community as a good place to practise and looks forward to continuing to serve as a rural ambassador as an RhPAP board member.

Now a father of four children, Dr. Awakan often shares his passion for rural medicine while attending conferences and other events with other health professionals.

“I tell them that in rural you get to apply your skills more and get to know the people in your community.”