



Bonnyville-based family physician Dr. Jonathan Barnard recently completed a one-year Family Practice Anesthesia Enhanced Skills Residency Training Program through RhPAP's Physician Skills Enrichment Grant Program.

— Photo supplied by Dr. Jonathan Barnard

Bonnyville area residents requiring anesthesia for surgeries and low-risk births will benefit when a local family physician returns to his clinic with enhanced skills this fall.

Dr. Jonathan Barnard recognized that there was a shortage of Bonnyville family physicians trained in anesthesia so he enrolled in the one-year Family Practice Anesthesia (FPA) Enhanced Skills Residency Training Program in September 2023 with funding through RhPAP's [Physician Skills Enrichment Grant Program](#).

The University of Alberta's intensive 12-month residency program gives rural and remote family physicians an opportunity to learn and feel confident providing basic anesthesia skills for emergency and elective surgery in their own communities.

Dr. Barnard began practising in the northeastern Alberta community in 2015 after friends encouraged him and his wife, Theresa, a general practitioner obstetrician, to leave rural South Africa and join them.

While he enjoyed his family practice, Dr. Barnard fondly remembers his time working in the intensive care unit in South Africa.

"It's something I was interested in the beginning and then just sort of naturally became something that was an option through my work here," says Dr. Barnard.

"My wife does obstetrics, so it seemed like a nice complement for that as we only have one doctor in our town right now that does epidurals. A lot of people will be transferred to different sites if we don't have epidural coverage here," he explains.



Dr. Jonathan Barnard enjoys some family time with his wife, Theresa, and sons, Nathan and Graham, in Canmore. — Photo supplied by Dr. Jonathan Barnard

Aside from obstetrics, Dr. Barnard says anesthesia training is beneficial for rural sites when it comes to handling airway management during emergencies and elective surgery as well.

“It does save the low-risk patients a trip to the city for their surgeries,” he says.

Through the program, Dr. Barnard was able to step back from his 900-patient panel for the year and focus full-time on the training based in Edmonton. Physician Skills Enrichment Grant Program funding helped cover the cost of renting a second home in Edmonton, while his wife and two young children remained in Bonnyville for the year.

“The financial support is obviously very important,” says Dr. Barnard, noting financial obligations continued while he was training in Edmonton.

“RhPAP allowed us to keep our foot in the door here in Bonnyville and allow my wife to do the job that she likes to do while I could be in Edmonton.”

Dr. Barnard says he was fortunate to find a locum who was interested in returning to the community to cover his patients while he was away.

Upon his return, he will share his remaining patient panel with his wife.

With his expanded skills in such demand (there are now two local physicians capable of doing epidurals and three trained in anesthesia), Dr. Barnard says it will be an adjustment returning to his family physician responsibilities.

He is hoping to balance both his roles as an FPA and primary care provider but recognizes it may be a challenge maintaining his new skills, ensuring his patients' needs are met, and balancing family life.

Dr. Barnard enjoys the scope of practice rural family medicine offers including working emergency shifts and having an opportunity to perform various procedures.

“My intention is to kind of try and do it all and see how it goes.”

*Since 1997, RhPAP's Physician Skills Enrichment Grant Program, formally known as the Peter K. Lindsay Program, has provided financial support to rural physicians seeking to enhance their training skills. Training opportunities can be a minimum of one day, stretching to 52 weeks.*