



Dr. Vamini Selvanandan enjoys exploring rural Alberta including Banff National Park, her backyard playground.

— Photo supplied by Dr. Vamini Selvanandan

Dr. Vamini Selvanandan has seen it all while covering for physicians across the province and beyond during her nearly quarter century career.

She wouldn't want it any other way.

The emergency physician primarily treats younger people with issues such as ski or sporting injuries at her Banff practice.

But during her role as a locum—where she fills in for physicians on vacation or leave

through the RhPAP-funded Alberta Medical Association (AMA) Weekend Locum Program and Seniors Locum Program—she often witnesses other health conditions.

“When I go out to the community through the AMA program, I generally work in small communities that have farmers and retired farmers, principally older folk moving in from the farms into these little communities,” she says.

“So I get to practice more of my geriatrics, more medical issues, congestive heart failure, pneumonia, all those things that I don’t always see in Banff. So it’s a win-win.”

Dr. Selvanandan has worked as a locum in 28 Alberta communities including 49 shifts in Claresholm where she covers in-patient and emergency shifts.



Banff is home base for Dr. Vamini Selvanandan but she enjoys expanding the scope of her practice through rural Alberta locums.

— Photo supplied by Dr. Vamini Selvanandan

Over the course of her career, she has taken on 183 assignments with the AMA program translating into 549 days of locum coverage.

“I enjoy meeting the people in rural Alberta and really getting to know them in an intimate way that you get through providing them with medical services. (You learn things) that you wouldn’t necessarily (experience) if you just drove through or stopped and ate at a restaurant,” explains Dr. Selvanandan.

The locum shifts have not only kept her hand in the medical field, but opened her eyes to interesting sites across Alberta such as Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Interpretive Centre and Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, among others.

Dr. Selvanandan says she always enjoys working as a locum, something she has done since her early career days and she encourages others to do the same.

“It’s a great way to get a lot of hands-on experience and gain confidence being the only doctor in town. Usually when you go there everybody else leaves so that they can have a bit of a break and that’s the whole idea.

“It might seem a little daunting at first, but it’s a great way to get yourself ready and confident in practice.”

The physician admits she is fortunate in that Banff has a good supply of emergency doctors available so she can often spend time away volunteering one weekend a month under the locum program.

“I’m definitely one of the longest serving physicians with the AMA,” says Dr. Selvanandan, who has worked with the locum program for 22 years. “There are a few others, but not many.”

As an experienced physician, she can also help mentor younger doctors while giving others a break from their hectic schedules.

“The AMA program has been instrumental in retaining physicians in small communities where they don’t have adequate physicians to cover their emergency room. Locums keep emergency rooms open. We know that for sure because when there is a request and it goes unfilled they will often close the emergency room at night if nobody can fill that.”



Dr. Vamini Selvanandan has spent considerable time in rural Alberta relieving other rural physicians while they are away from their practices. She recently shared her rural medical expertise as a volunteer in Bhutan where she taught paramedic students traumatic life support using simulation-based learning.

— Photo supplied by Dr. Vamini Selvanandan

Dr. Selvanandan emphasizes that support for rural healthcare is paramount.

She recently received funding to take a point of care ultrasound course funded through RhPAP's Physician Skills Enrichment Program. She now serves as a member of RhPAP's General Emergency Medicine Skills (GEMS) Scientific Planning Committee, which is reviewing module revisions. She also participated in RhPAP's Rural Mentorship Program, serving as a weekend preceptor in Bow Island.

"I think RhPAP is invaluable. Any support that physicians can get to work in rural areas goes a long way," she says noting that emergency education is crucial.

"(Emergencies) are what's probably the most anxiety-provoking thing for most locums and for family physicians who are thinking of working rural. GEMS standardizes and raises a level of care so that patients in rural areas are getting good care."