



Autumn in Alberta

Farmers near Pincher Creek work to collect this year's harvest.

Photograph by Bobby Jones, RhPAP

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Rural health matters

Update from RhPAP's Board Chair

Having access to health services as quickly and efficiently as possible matters to all Albertans.

Timely access to quality health care isn't just convenient; it can be, quite literally, a matter of life or death, especially for those who live rurally and for their communities.

Simply, for those of us who live and work outside Alberta's major centres, rural health matters.

Some might think this idea goes without saying.

However, our experience is that we can never say it enough.

Therefore, starting with this edition, we are re-branding our Quarterly publication "Rural Health Matters" (RHM for short).

Building upon our successful Alberta Rural Health Week Campaign of 2019, we want to emphasize the fact that the mantra "Rural Health Matters" underscores everything that we do.



It remains a privilege for us to continue our support of practising rural Alberta physicians and multidisciplinary teams, enabling them to acquire continuing medical education and locum support.

Our efforts to help a growing number of local attraction and retention committees to build strategies to attract and retain health professionals to and in their communities remind us we're here to serve rural Albertans, first and foremost. At present, RhPAP is working with nearly 50 committees in over 140 Alberta municipalities!

It remains a privilege for us to continue our support of practising rural Alberta physicians and multidisciplinary teams, enabling them to acquire continuing professional education and locum support. We also look forward to assisting the next generation of health professionals—including rural family medicine resident physicians and health-care students—as they develop their skills in rural communities.

Finally, we are proud to be a trusted rural voice to the provincial government on issues related to rural health workforce and physician resource planning, with almost 30 years of experience and expertise as an organization to back it up.

Being a rural doctor in a rural Alberta community, I know rural health matters.

For RhPAP, the good health of rural Albertans is the only thing that matters.

Dr. Rob Warren



RhPAP is here to support Alberta's rural physicians

Enriching Your Skills

RhPAP supports skills development for rural health professionals. Rural physicians can access funding to upgrade existing skills or gain new skills in order to meet the medical needs of their community.

RhPAP offers a number of programs, including:

- A customizable **Enrichment Training Program** to assist physicians training in rural or regional communities in courses up to one year long
- **Emergency Medicine Enrichment (EME)** and **General Emergency Medical Skills (GEMS)** courses
- Various **continuing medical education** and **continuous professional learning (CME/CPL)** opportunities

Finding You a Place to Live

RhPAP's Accommodations Program provides resident physicians and health-care students with a place to call home while experiencing life and career opportunities in rural communities.

Coordinating Locum Relief

RhPAP supports AMA Physician Locum Services® by providing short-term locum coverage to rural physicians practicing in communities with four or fewer physicians.

An Opportunity to Give Back

RhPAP's Mentorship Program is an excellent way to promote your practice and community to students considering working in rural Alberta. You get to pick the time and dates that work for you and RhPAP will take care of the rest.

For more information on these opportunities, visit rhpap.ca/physicians

Looking back, moving forward

Update from RhPAP's Executive Director

Folks,

It has been nearly three years since the Rural Physician Action Plan graciously accepted a change in mandate from the Government of Alberta, changed our name to the Rural Health Professions Action Plan, and refined what we provide rural Albertan communities, based on feedback from you.

It has been a whirlwind of change and activity since.

As the statistics in this journal show, with the full involvement of our RhPAP Community, we have been busy. We are making a difference and want to do more. Before I get to the “more” part though, I want to share with you a few highlights from the past year:

- Our Community Development & Engagement Team has increased the numbers of the attraction and retention committees with whom we work to cover a broader swath of Alberta's rural communities. While so doing, we rebuilt our community development tools to make them more useful and are implementing professional development in this area to better serve rural communities.
- We continue to provide medical resident and student housing in 50 rural communities and have expanded access to these properties to nursing students and other health professionals.



As the statistics in this journal show, with the full involvement of our RhPAP Community, we have been busy. We are making a difference and want to do more.

- We continue to support practising rural family physicians and multidisciplinary teams with professional development opportunities along with hundreds of hours of professional development workshops through a long-standing partnership with the University of Calgary Cumming School of Medicine.
- The unique rural physician locum program, providing weekend, short-term and seniors' coverage for rural physicians, has grown in demand by nearly 20 per cent!
- With a tradition of recognizing rural physician excellence, RhPAP expanded our capacity to help rural communities recognize rural health professionals, not just physicians, through our rebuilding RhPAP's Awards Program – now called the Rhapsody Awards.
- One of the key messages in our strategic planning survey in 2017 was that rural communities want to be heard and want all Albertans to know that rural Alberta is a great place to live. In this regard, RhPAP expanded our capacity to get the rural story “out there,” using social and traditional media. The tremendous feedback we receive from you tells us we are on the right track. If you haven't already, please subscribe to our various social media channels...you will be glad you did!

Now to the wanting to “do more” part of RhPAP making a difference...

As we enter the fall of 2019, we will be developing our strategic plan for the next three years. Once again, we want to hear from you: what ideas do you have on what RhPAP may be able to do to help rural Albertan communities have better access to health care? What might RhPAP be able to do better to support the health workforce that enables this access? Please write me directly at bernard.anderson@rhpap.ca. I would love to hear from you.

On a closing note, throughout all the changes at the Rural Health Professionals Action Plan over the last few years, one thing that has not changed is the dedication of the staff who, along with myself, believe it is a privilege to serve rural Alberta. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bernard C. Anderson'.

Bernard C. Anderson



“Grande Cache is beautiful, but you can’t move here only for that; it’s about the people.”

— Dr. Leon Greeff

#Attraction & Retention

Embracing the adventure: Dr. Leon Greeff’s journey to practise in Grande Cache

Article: Melissa Myers-Connors

For Dr. Leon Greeff, the path to practising family medicine at the northern edge of the Rocky Mountains in Grande Cache, Alberta, was not a direct or apparent one.

It began, as he describes it, through a “divine intervention” locum experience, initiated by an email exchange with Grande Cache physician, and RhPAP Board member, Dr. John Gillett.

Dr. Greeff graduated from the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, where he practised medicine until moving with his wife, Dr. Lienki du Plessis, to Cold Lake, Alberta, in October 2006.

After practising in Cold Lake and, then, in Calgary, Dr. Greeff and his family moved back to Cape Town, South Africa. Knowing there was a good chance they would return to Alberta permanently in the future, Dr. Greeff continued to practise in Alberta as a locum physician, maintaining his connection to the province.

Dr. Greeff chuckles as he reflects on his introduction to practising in Grande Cache.

By chance, he found a locum posting advertised online and emailed Dr. Gillett about filling the role. That one-time, “divine intervention” led to repeat visits to Grande Cache throughout 2016 and 2018. “Locums are a great way to get experience in a variety of settings and figure out what you like and what you don’t like,” Dr. Greeff adds.

Through his recurring locums in Grande Cache, he became immersed in the clinic, getting to know its patients and the team of physicians, nurses, and other health professionals, as well as the community.

So, when Dr. Greeff, his wife, and their two daughters decided to relocate to Canada, Grande Cache “was the obvious choice.”

At the start of 2019, they took up permanent residence in the hamlet nestled in the Canadian Rockies. Framed by twenty-one mountain peaks and the Smoky River, Dr. Greeff and his family are happy to have settled in this picturesque community of about 3,500 people.

“I’m happy to be here and really thriving,” Dr. Greeff says cheerfully. “Grande Cache has a family atmosphere. It offers a family-oriented lifestyle, and, for our two young daughters, the community is perfect for this season of our lives.”

Dr. Greeff emphasizes that “Grande Cache is beautiful, but you can’t move here only for that; it’s about the people.”

This sentiment rings true in his work as well. It helps that there is a strong team spirit and a supportive environment at the local clinic and health centre.

“You are part of a team where everyone pulls their weight,” Dr. Greeff explains. “It’s a good place to be.”

Dr. Greeff’s practice is varied, filled with routine clinic and hospital work, acute care, and the unexpected.

“The mix and pace really suits me,” he says. “It helped make Grande Cache a place where I knew I could make a difference.”

Dr. Greeff believes in embracing the seasons of life and being open to change and opportunities. With this philosophy in mind, he has practised in urban, rural, and international settings. While he did not start his career planning to live and practise in Grande Cache, Alberta, he has enjoyed the journey to this rural destination. 🏡

Chair of RhPAP Board chosen as director for popular rural medicine residency program

Congratulations to Dr. Rob Warren on his appointment as one of two site directors for the Red Deer site of University of Alberta's Rural Alberta North (RAN) Family Medicine Residency Program.

In addition to continuing his practice at the Moose and Squirrel Medical Clinic in Sundre and serving as chair of the RhPAP Board of Directors, Dr. Warren will now oversee the delivery of the residency program one day per week.

“I want to share my passion for rural medicine, what I believe is special about it, and have them follow the same path.”

— Dr. Rob Warren

There are presently 22 residents from across Canada and around the world enrolled in the RAN program. During their two years of residency training, these residents spend 40 weeks experiencing rural medicine in small towns across rural Alberta.

According to Dr. Warren, the program has proven exceptionally successful at promoting rural medical practice. More than half of the trainees who have graduated from the program have taken up practice in rural Alberta, including Dr. Warren, who graduated from the RAN Program in 2011. Since then, he has been joined by four other graduates of the program at the Moose and Squirrel Medical Clinic, which he owns along with his wife and colleague, Dr. Michelle Warren. He has also served as a preceptor (a physician mentor) for the past seven years. During this time, he has trained 25 medical residents from just the Red Deer site alone. Dr. Warren's clinic has also been involved in training dozens of other medical learners from programs across Canada.

Dr. Warren insists that the true strength of the program is that it allows trainees to get a real understanding of what is required to practise rural medicine well since they are taught by rural doctors in a rural setting.

He feels this program aligns nicely with RhPAP's mandate of supporting the attraction and retention of well-trained rural health professionals to and in rural communities.

He now looks forward to getting to know all of the residents within the RAN Program, not just those who are training in Sundre.

“I want to share my passion for rural medicine, what I believe is special about it, and have them follow the same path.” 



#RhPAP

Meet Alicia Fox, RhPAP's new rural consultant for the north east

What a summer it has been! Thanks to the opportunity I was given here at RhPAP as the new North East Rural Community Consultant, I've had the immense privilege of visiting various corners of this zone and meeting scads of people passionate about their communities' futures, quality health care, and the people who provide those services.

I have lived in rural Alberta nearly all my life, with the exception of a few years in Calgary when I pursued my Bachelor of Applied Communications at Mount Royal University. From there, I worked in the newspaper industry for almost 10 years before coming aboard RhPAP in 2017 as a freelance storyteller for their phenomenal communications team. This afforded me great insight into communities across Alberta! In my professional life, I wore several hats, from journalist to piano teacher to events/program coordinator to full-time stay-at-home mom for my three children. Throughout all of that, my focus remained on the importance of people and their stories.

I am very excited to shift my energy to community development and engagement, elevating the rural voice, supporting committees in their efforts to attract and retain health professionals, and working alongside rural Albertans as they continue to develop their success stories within their communities. I feel very fortunate to work with such a remarkable organization as well as team of consultants!

If I'm not on the road or at the computer, you'll find me volunteering with my local Smoky Lake Kinette group, sewing some new creation, or enjoying the outdoors in and around the "Pumpkin Capital of Alberta" with my family. If our paths cross along the way, I look forward to connecting with you!

— Alicia Fox



(Left) The Quad Municipality Healthcare Support Committee displays the \$50,000 cheque for Milk River's new SonoSite Edge Point-of-Care Ultrasound.

(Opposite Page) A health professional instructs high school students during a Rural High School Skills Event in Provost.

#Health-care Heroes

Digging deep pays off as portable ultrasound equipment comes to Milk River

Article & Photos: Julie Davis

Milk River is now home to world-class portable ultrasound technology, thanks to the foresight and generosity of local health professionals and residents.

The community, an hour south of Lethbridge, is now home to new SonoSite Edge portable Point-of-Care Ultrasound (POCUS) equipment, adding to the diagnostic tools available to local health professionals to enhance the services currently being offered to people of Milk River and surrounding communities.

The system was purchased by Dr. Pieter Krog, who saw the value it could add to patient care by improving diagnostic certainty.

Thanks to the generosity of local residents, community organizations, businesses, and local town and county councils, fundraising efforts covered the cost of the SonoSite equipment in only four months!

Dr. Krog's eyes were opened to the potential of Point-of-Care Ultrasound in the community after he and Mark Simons, a local physician assistant, took a Point-of-Care Ultrasound Course partially subsidized by RhPAP. The Emergency Department Echo (EDE) Ultrasound Course was held in Claresholm earlier this year. The EDE Course provides health professionals from across rural Alberta with four days of intensive training, leaving them well prepared to use bedside ultrasound skills in the real world.

Upon completing the course, Dr. Krog purchased the equipment, covering the \$50,000 cost of the equipment out of his own pocket, for use in the clinic and Emergency Department. To help offset the cost to Dr. Krog, the Quad Municipality Healthcare Support Committee stepped up to help. The Committee, which is made up of local residents and council members from Coutts, Milk River, Warner, and the County of Warner, assisted Dr. Krog and the Milk River Medical Clinic to fundraise for the new equipment. Thanks to the generosity of local residents, community organizations, businesses, and local town and county councils, fundraising efforts covered the cost of the SonoSite equipment in only four months!

There was some additional money raised above the ultrasound costs that will go towards subsidizing future physician's training in the future. One new physician who will be joining Dr. Krog soon, has already shown interest in taking the course so he can use this diagnostic tool. The equipment is already of great benefit to patients in both the clinic and the Milk River Health Centre Emergency Department.

Our sincerest thanks and appreciation goes out to all of those who donated! 🏠

RhPAP Rural High School Skills Days

RhPAP offers support to rural Alberta community attraction and retention committees to partner with their local health facility and high school(s) in hosting a rural high school skills day in the community.

The interactive day offers high school students a hands-on opportunity to engage in common health-care activities. Students can also speak with the instructors about health-related careers in the community, health-care provider job experiences, and the educational requirements for specific health-care careers. The intent of the high school skills day event is to encourage local students to consider a career in rural health care and learn about the local opportunities available.

For more information visit rhpap.ca/skills



#Skills

Provost aims to bring students' focus to rural health care

Article & Photos: Alicia Fox

A day in the life of a high school student doesn't normally include suturing, intubation, or neck immobilization training.

However, for a group of 46 students from rural schools in central Alberta, the learning was outside the classroom and, in some cases, inside a set of pig lungs.

High school students from Hughenden Public School, Provost Public School, and Saint Thomas Aquinas School gathered at Provost Medical Centre recently to attend the RhPAP-sponsored Rural High School Skills Event, aimed at bringing up the next generation to consider a career in rural health care.

The "way of the future"

Gary Duffett, Economic Development Officer for the Town of Provost, first heard about RhPAP's initiatives at a conference in Banff, and contacted his area consultant, Colleen Lindholm, about getting a similar event off the ground in his town.

"This is the way of the future," Duffett said, adding that he knew Provost had a "top notch facility" and wanted to do something for local students. "And here we are."

He, along with the rest of the committee organizing this event, credits RhPAP and Lindholm for the direction and support they provided in helping this event come to fruition.

Exposure to options

Barb Hawkens, one of the organizers and a member of her local school's Parent Council, said she told one student that perhaps the day might help them decide that health care isn't what they want to do – and that's fine too – but at least it gives them exposure to more of their options.

Over the course of the day, the students began asking very targeted questions, including what education they might need for a career in health care or where they could get their start.

"They're really starting to be more interested in thinking about different things," she said.

Opportunities beyond the front line

Unique to this skills event was the early tour of the hospital, where the students saw everything from laundry, to maintenance, to materials management.

"There's a lot of other jobs behind the scenes that you don't think of... that are great opportunities for people," Hawkens added.

Tara Weinkauf, administrative assistant with Alberta Health Services, said the goals of the event are really to raise awareness, to get the students into the mindset of rural health care, to encourage them to spread the word to their friends in other rural settings, and – eventually – to bring them back home once they've graduated.

Dr. Renee Deagle had the opportunity to teach the students suturing and remarked that some of the students seemed to have a natural gift.

"Some of them caught on super fast, which was good to see," she said. "It was fun."

While she did not have a similar opportunity in high school, she said it would have been great to have seen all her options before she graduated.

"We're hoping that this is going to be an annual event if we can do that." – Gary Duffett

"If I had th[is] opportunity, I might have thought about being a physician a little bit sooner," she said.

A big hit with the students

The participating students all had great feedback on the experience.

Wyatt Ford, a Grade 12 student from Hughenden Public School, said he had not previously considered a career in health care, but says it is a viable option if he decides to take a different path than what he has already chosen.

"I'd probably go rural if I did do it," he said.

Payton Manning, in the same class as Ford, said her favourite part of the day was anything hands on, which included suturing, intubation, and inflating the pig's lungs.

"I really enjoyed it," she insisted, adding she is going into nursing and wanted to get a jumpstart on the learning.

Alysa Bolz, who attends Grade 11 at St. Thomas Aquinas School, said it was cool to see what nurses actually do, and would "100 per cent recommend it" to others to attend, while Ashlyn Landmark, a Grade 11 student from Provost Public High School, said the event clarified the difference between some of the jobs she had been considering for her own future career.

"Thanks to RhPAP, really," said Duffett. "Our committee is already speaking about the secondary school program and maybe looking at that, and we're hoping that this is going to be an annual event if we can do that." 📌



#Skills

Lattes and bucking bulls: A wild time at Tofield Skills Weekend

Article & Photos: Bobby Jones

Bucking bulls, paintball pellets, live music, and lattes were among the many highlights of a recent Health Skills Event in Tofield.

Close to 40 nursing and medicine students from the University of Alberta travelled to Tofield on April 13 and 14 for an immersive community experience, and the opportunity to learn skills that rural health professionals use every day.

This trailblazing event also marked the first time that participants stayed with billets rather than at a hotel during a Rural Health Professions Action Plan (RhPAP) Skills Weekend.

Cyndy Heslin, chairperson for the Community Attraction and Retention Committee for Tofield, Ryley, and Beaver County, insisted that the billet experience was a chance to get a real taste of the Tofield lifestyle.

“One of the reasons we wanted them to be billeted was that they could actually be in the homes of people [who] live out here and talk to them firsthand,” Heslin explained.

The skills training portion of the weekend took place at the Tofield Health Centre, where a team of local health professionals happily volunteered their time to teach the health-care students new skills.

“They are giving their best to the students today with the recognition that we need to be part of recruitment,” said Mel Henriksen, acute care area manager, Alberta Health Services. “We need to grow those students into expert practitioners and keep our health care alive in rural Alberta.”

Licensed practical nurse, Rhonda Smith, who taught Intravenous (I.V.) starts and injections, added, “You learn [from] everybody, and we’re such a great teaching community out here that all the staff just work together – ‘what do you need, we’ll do it.’ They’ll teach you right in the moment.”

The skills weekend was a wonderful chance for instructors to share why they chose to practise in rural Alberta.

“You know everyone,” said Vinu Abraham, a nurse practitioner who taught suturing. “You know their family. You are connected personally to everyone, so that’s what I really like in rural [practice].”

“What drew me out to rural was [the idea that] you’re it,” added Chrissy Maxwell, a registered nurse who also taught I.V. starts and injections. “You’re coming to a critical patient [in emergency] and you have to manage that patient until transport out can get to you safely, so you have to know your stuff.”



(Opposite page) A Bull Bash participant goes for a wild ride (Right) Nurse Practitioner Vinu Abraham instructs a student in suturing (Left) Students learning intubation

After the skills event, the students were guests of honour at a community dinner. It was the beginning of an action-packed Saturday night in Tofield. Magician, Greg Dodds, performed card tricks and much more at the dinner. He had students laughing and wondering, “how did he do that?”

Next, the students went to the local arena for the Bull Bash. Bull riders from all over Alberta entered the arena to an impressive pyrotechnics display. The cowboys certainly proved their grit as they were tossed, flipped, and hurled off adrenaline-charged and high-kicking bulls.

It was the first time most of the students had been to a bull bash.

“I think Tofield has really [confirmed for me that] ‘yeah, rural is the way I want to go for sure.’”

— Kelly Anderson

“The bull bash was phenomenal,” said an amazed Sharkar Jha, who is in first-year medicine. “It was quite exciting. There was a lot of energy in that room.”

Next, organizers mellowed the mood a bit with a visit to the Moonshine Cafe. Everyone kicked back with a latte or cappuccino, met students from other health disciplines, soaked in the sweet tunes of singer and musician Abby K., and tested their accuracy in a game of darts.

“We thought with the skills weekend, we would get... students out here so they could see what rural Alberta is like,” says Cyndy Heslin. “That it’s not some place way far away, and that there are a lot of fun things that they can do when they come out here.”

Billets picked up the students from the cafe and took them to their homes to rest up for a busy Sunday. Realtor, Greg Litwin, and his wife, Leanne, had a full house. They hosted eight of the students.

In the morning, the group headed out to Sniper Paintball in Beaver County, east of Tofield. Students had fun firing paintballs at a wide choice of targets.

The RhPAP Skills Weekend in Tofield wrapped up at Islet Lake, west of Tofield. A popular getaway in summer, the lake still had a thin layer of spring ice on it in mid-April, a nearby crackling fire with roasting hot dogs and conversation adding the warmth. It was the perfect time for students to reflect on whether rural practice could be the right career choice for them.

“I went to the Rimbey Skills Weekend as well and that’s when I started thinking about rural,” said Kelly Anderson, a second-year student in the Nursing After-degree Program. “I have recently been accepted to go to Wetaskiwin for my last preceptorship, so I will be going rural that way. So I think Tofield has really [confirmed for me that] ‘yeah, rural is the way I want to go for sure.’”

“Honestly, I think It’s been awesome,” adds third-year nursing student Olu Wasoore Fasunwom. “I love the atmosphere of family. It strengthened my thoughts about rural. [Practising rurally] has been something I’ve considered for a long time.”



(L-R) RhPAP Medical School Awards winners Karly Nikkel, Curtis Woolf (with his wife Amy) and Kelly Anderson

#Student Support

RhPAP Medical School Award recipients primed for rural practice

Article: Tana Findlay

RhPAP is proud to announce the recipients of this year’s Rural Medical Student Bursary: Kelly Anderson and Curtis Woolf (University of Alberta) and Karly Nikkel (University of Calgary). Each year, RhPAP offers up to four \$5,000 awards to rural Alberta medical students—two students from the University of Alberta and two from the University of Calgary—to assist with the student’s expenses as they study medicine.

We asked these future health professionals about their experiences growing up in rural Alberta, and how it influenced their decision to practise medicine.

RHB: *What interests you about rural practice?*

Kelly Anderson: The unique physician-patient relationship that develops in providing care to patients through all stages of their life is a huge draw to practising family medicine in the same community over a long period of time. Specifically, practising within a rural environment would provide the opportunity to work in emergency settings, women’s health, pediatrics, and geriatrics. The broad scope of practice for rural family physicians seems to be the best fit for my interests.

Curtis Woolf: [After 15 years practicing chiropractic in Edmonton,] I was tired of being so specialized and wished that I was able to have a larger scope of practice. I like the idea of being a generalist and I think rural family medicine seems to be one of the most general areas in medicine, allowing you to do many different things from emergency, to obstetrics, to traditional family medicine, and even, possibly, anesthesiology.

Karly Nikkel: My previous experiences in [nursing] allowed me to recognize that many rural and remote communities continue to be in need of physicians committed to the community long term. I trained alongside physicians in Raymond, Claresholm, and Cardston where I saw the incredible scope a family physician can practise in. Their relationships with patients provided comfort and trust in the professional relationship and enhanced healing and peace of mind.

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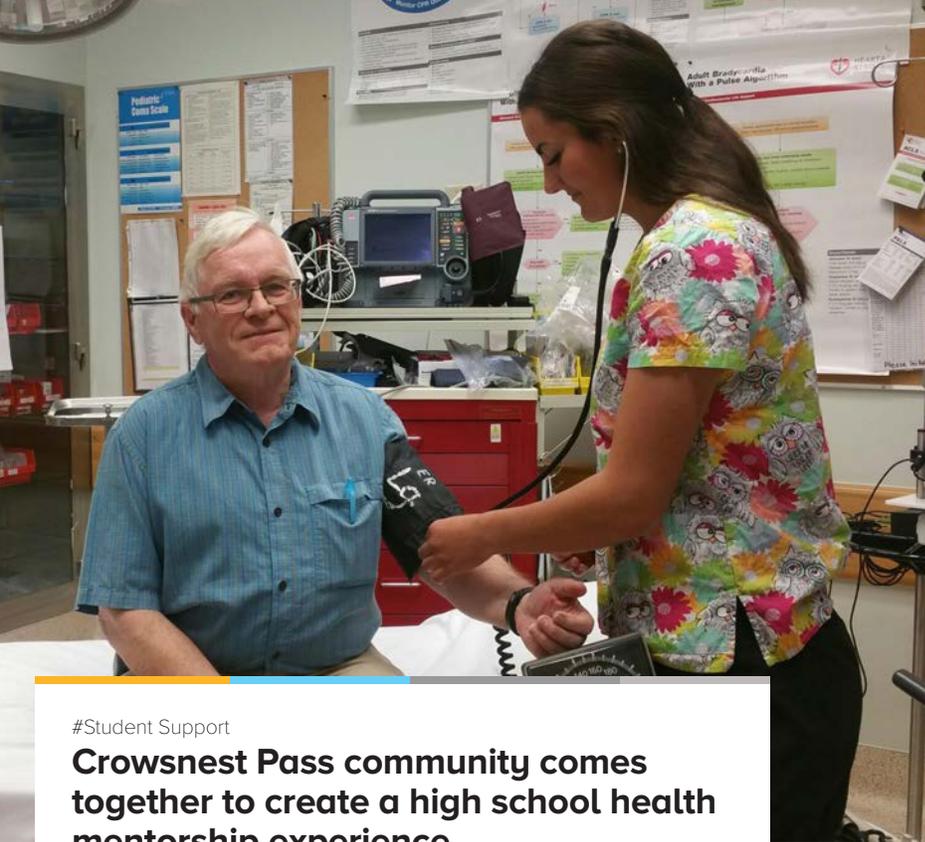
To read the full interview with our Medical School Award recipients, visit rhpap.ca/news-events/msa-2019

Get primed for rural practice!

The RhPAP Rural Medical School Award provides \$5,000 to assist with students’ expenses as they study medicine. The Award is granted to up to four students per year (maximum of two Awards per Alberta medical school), to be applied to the following year of their medical degree.

Apply now! The deadline for applications is November 1.

To learn more about award eligibility and submission requirements, please download the RhPAP Medical Student Financial Support Application Form from rhpap.ca/msa



#Student Support

Crowsnest Pass community comes together to create a high school health mentorship experience

Article & Photos: Julie Davis

How do you support a rural high school student in their journey to become a rural health-care provider? Well, it takes a community.

In the Crowsnest Pass, it took the efforts of a local family physician, a school district off-site career coordinator, and a health centre site manager along with an RhPAP stipend and Alberta Health Services (AHS) coordination to create a unique summer mentorship experience.

Dr. Allan Garbutt, Crowsnest Pass family physician, was instrumental in developing RhPAP's medical student-rural physician mentorship program to expose first-year students to rural practice.

So it was a natural transition to expand this mentorship program to a local high school student.

The result of this team effort was a six-week work experience for Hailey Grove, a Grade 11 student at Livingstone School in Lundbreck. Hailey spent this period shadowing various health-care providers at the Crowsnest Pass Health Centre in Blairmore.

“It was an easy win to support a local youth to expose [Hailey] to rural health-care careers.”

— Sarah MacDonald, Talent Acquisitions Student and Youth Engagement Coordinator, AHS

She shadowed staff across the rural health centre, spending time in volunteer services, long-term care, X-ray, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and non-clinical services among other departments. She also attended rounds and followed the nursing program preceptor and nursing students in their on-site training. Another notable experience was in Recreation Therapy, where Hailey attended a community pool weight-lifting class.

When asked what she enjoyed most, Hailey responded, “I liked the Lab and the [Emergency Department] the most, as I was able to do a lot of things.”

For Hailey, working at the local hospital runs in family.

Her mom, Latisha, is a medical lab assistant, and her grandmother,

Wendy Francis, was an operating room nurse for 24 years.

According to Latisha, the Pincher Creek High School Skills Day, hosted by the Pincher Creek Attraction and Retention Society and RhPAP, also helped to pique her daughter's interest in a health career.

“Hailey enjoyed the suturing station so much that she came home and practised with the suturing material they had on the farm,” she recalled.

Sarah MacDonald, Talent Acquisitions Student and Youth Engagement Coordinator, AHS, helps build relationships between post-secondary educational institutions and organizations such as RhPAP at High School Skills Days and Post-Secondary Skills Weekends at AHS sites.

She says this project came about quickly.

“It was an easy win to support a local youth to expose her to rural health-care careers,” added MacDonald.

John Taylor, Livingstone Range School District off-site career coordinator, assisted Hailey in setting up the summer mentorship to receive work experience credits. John was also instrumental in coordinating the regional high school students to attend the High School Skills Day in Pincher Creek.

He is very supportive of learning opportunities that help students discover and support their career path.

“It is always amazing for me to see our school division partnering with other agencies to provide such worthwhile experiences for our youth,” Taylor added. “Hailey took full advantage of this opportunity to sharpen her knowledge and skills as she prepares for a career in health care. Many thanks to everyone that made this happen!”

Another source of support was Crowsnest Pass Health Centre site manager, Liz Cook, who developed the six-week program for Hailey. RhPAP is hoping to learn from Liz, and the other stakeholders in this mentorship experience to support possible future opportunities.

So, what's next for Hailey?

She is starting Grade 12 and will be taking an anatomy and physiology dual credit course through Bow Valley College alongside her other courses this year and plans to apply to nursing programs for next year.

We support rural students' health-care career pathways and wish Hailey all the best in her rural health-care career journey! 📌



RURAL HEALTH PROFESSIONS ACTION PLAN 2018/19 HIGHLIGHTS

Rural Community Development & Engagement

- 48 active rural Attraction and Retention (A&R) committees representing 146 hamlets, villages, towns, and municipalities across rural Alberta.
- Supported over 150 A&R committee meetings.
- Attended three Stollery Awasisak Indigenous Health Talking Circles.
- Five A&R committee grants were distributed.
- Updated the Rural Community A&R Toolkit, a guide with 150 pages of hands-on, practical information.
- Developed a rural community building webinar series.

Rural Education Outreach & Skills Days

- 13 Skills Events held for high school students (six) and post-secondary students (seven).

Events & Presentations

- 41 events and presentations to partners, stakeholders, and communities.
- Rural Alberta Community A&R Conference offered in Brooks, with 97 participants from across Alberta.

Health Professional Development

- Delivered two Comprehensive Approaches to Rural Emergencies (CARE) Courses and three Emergency Department Echocardiogram (EDE) courses to rural health professionals.
- Sponsored 26 rural nurses to attend the Banff Endoscopy Skills Conference.
- Supported seven participants in RhPAP's Rural Physician Enrichment programs and 27 participants in RhPAP's General Emergency Medical Skills (GEMS) program.
- Aided two rural physicians to advance their competencies in ultrasound and anesthesiology.

Housing Program

Offers students and residents accommodations when they are in rural Alberta.

- 133 leases in 52 communities

Rural Locum Program

Provides funding that allows AMA Physician Locum Services® to offer short-term locum service for physicians in rural areas.

Weekend Program 877/890 days
of requests filled

Seniors' Weekend Program 875/891 days
of requests filled



98% of all locum requests filled



Housing Breakdown

University of Alberta

- 142 Students
- 80 Residents
- 30 RCI Residents
- 23 ICC Clerks
- 35 Rural Residents
- 24 Nursing Students

University of Calgary

- 175 Students
- 70 Residents
- 80 RCI Residents
- 23 UCLIC
- 35 Rural Residents

Medicine Hat College

- 5 Nursing Students

RURAL HEALTH PROFESSIONS ACTION PLAN 2018/19 HIGHLIGHTS

RhPAP Rhapsody Awards

- Revitalized Rhapsody Awards package to include Rural Community Award, Rural Physician Award, and Rural Health-care Heroes Award.

Rural Health Research

- Conducted research on the strategies that rural Alberta communities use to attract and retain physicians and other health professionals, in partnership with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) and the DLRI Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary.
- Collaborated with the University of Alberta to research how rural settings foster interprofessional teamwork in rural nursing and medicine students.

Tell the Rural Health-care Story

- Developed and launched new RhPAP website.
- Regular media coverage in rural weeklies.
- Developed at least 19 different partnerships for cross-communication and promotion of rural issues.

Partnerships & Committees

- RhPAP is a member of Alberta Health Services (AHS) Workforce Strategy Steering Committee.
- RhPAP serves on the Ministry of Health's Physician Resource Planning Advisory Committee.
- Developing a Rural Voice Information Panel (Rural VIP), a provincial platform for rural communities to provide perspective and input on health-related matters.
- Supporting the Canadian Mental Health Association on a three-year Rural Mental Health project.

Mentorship Program



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1,419 Followers (+8%)
327 Tweets



Facebook

+395,660 People Reached
1,325 Likes (+147%)
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Strategies to prepare students for rural life

Article: **Melissa Myers-Connors**

Attracting and retaining health professionals to rural practice involves a range of personal, professional, and community factors.* These dimensions must align for a health provider to enter, remain, and thrive in a rural environment.

Education also plays an important role in recruiting health-care providers to rural areas. Cultivating students' interest in rural health care and preparing them for rural life and practice can have a significant impact on decisions to go, and stay, rural; in fact, in one study, it was determined that feeling prepared for small-town living was a greater indicator for physician retention than feeling prepared for rural practice.

There are a number of factors strongly associated with entry into rural medical practice, including rural upbringing and training in a rural location. Strategies have been developed to increase the number of students from rural areas, such as creating or increasing spots for students with rural backgrounds and screening for interest in rural medicine.

Because students raised in urban areas will also practise as rural physicians, positive undergraduate and postgraduate training opportunities in rural settings, as well as exposure to rural life, can encourage students from all backgrounds to consider rural practice.

The study, "Cultivating Country Doctors: Preparing Learners for Rural Life and Community Leadership," explores how medical schools successful in producing rural physicians prepare students for rural life independent of clinical skills.

Overall, the study identifies strategies that training programs may implement to successfully cultivate rural interest among students, prepare them for rural life, and help them foster a rural identity, wherein students and residents ultimately plan to enter and stay in rural practice.

These findings are also relevant for students in other health professions and for community groups similar to RhPAP's attraction and retention (A&R) committees who support health professionals in their communities.

The study's recommendations reflect five themes:

1. Be intentional about strategies to prepare students for rural practice
2. Identify and cultivate rural interest
3. Develop confidence and competence to meet rural community needs
4. Teach skills in leadership and improving community health problems
5. Fully engage rural host communities throughout the training process

Ultimately, many factors influence medical residents and health-care students' decisions to enter and remain in rural practice. Multiple strategies at various stages of education and training work together to cultivate interest in practising in rural areas and to improve students' and residents' preparedness to move into careers as rural health professionals.

RhPAP's programs and initiatives, as well as partnerships with Alberta's universities and colleges, rural communities, and health-care organizations, offer support to students throughout their journey into rural practice. 🏡

* — For a list of references sourced for this article, please email info@rhpap.ca.



“Rural has always been an interest of mine, but I grew up in Vancouver and then I moved to Edmonton, so I’ve never been exposed to it. And it was really exceptional to learn firsthand from the people who are up here.”

— University of Alberta nursing student who participated in a Cold Lake Skills Weekend

Seven effective strategies

The following strategies, highlighted in bold, align with RhPAP’s efforts to encourage students to consider health-care practice in rural Alberta:

1. Cast a wide net; urban students also go into rural practice and non-rural programs also graduate rural physicians.

RhPAP works with attraction and retention committees and local health professionals to host Skills Weekends, where post-secondary health students visit rural Alberta communities and health facilities to learn specific health-care skills. Participants include nursing, medicine, pharmacy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech pathology students from rural and urban backgrounds, who learn what it is like to provide rural health care and receive firsthand exposure to what rural communities have to offer. These future health professionals discover practice sites they may wish to consider for long-term opportunities. And for participants experiencing rural communities for the first time, a Skills Weekend can be a valuable first step in choosing to live and work as a health professional in rural Alberta.

2. Encourage students and medical residents to live in the community during rotations and encourage preceptors to involve them in community activities.

RhPAP’s Rural Housing Program provides accommodations for medical residents and medical, nursing, pharmacy, and midwifery students in rural teaching communities so they can stay in the area where they are training and experience rural life. Attraction and retention committees often make connections with students in the community and invite them to local events and attractions.

3. Expose students to quality rural experiences with well-trained, experienced preceptors who understand students’ educational objectives and enjoy rural practice.

In collaboration with the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary, RhPAP’s Rural Mentorship Program connects first- and second-year medical students with rural physicians. Students job-shadow experienced preceptors and learn medical skills in a rural context, receiving early awareness of, and exposure to, rural practice.

4. Promote interaction among students interested in rural practice at various stages of training and across disciplines.

Both High School Skills Days and Post-secondary Skills Weekends are interactive events where students can engage in common hands-on health-care activities and speak with instructors about health careers in the community. Health-care students from various disciplines experience opportunities for interprofessional learning and collaboration at Skills Weekends.

5. Introduce students and medical residents to rural communities.

Many attraction and retention committees include medical residents and health-care students in their activities by welcoming them to the community, inviting them to local events, and even providing information packages with coupons for local shops and businesses.

6. Encourage students and medical residents to rotate through communities of different sizes to help their families and themselves find a good fit.

RhPAP’s various programs and initiatives provide opportunities for students and residents to experience different rural communities. By doing so, they can appreciate each area’s unique attributes, understand local health needs, and determine if the setting would be a personal and professional fit. Attraction and retention committees showcase the best of rural life and what a community has to offer, which can help students, residents, and their families consider returning for future opportunities. Locum physicians and travel nurses who provide temporary coverage for doctors and nurses in rural clinics and hospitals can also be included in efforts to showcase the community. These temporary placements are a way for health professionals to explore different communities and practice options, and to see where they might like to settle in the long term.

7. Share rural practice joys and success stories and address misconceptions about rural practice.

RhPAP shares the good news stories about rural health and highlights the best of living and working in rural Alberta communities.



#Physician Support

Enhanced Surgical Skills update

Article: Dr. Jared Van Bussel, RhPAP Regional Advisor, Physician Policy Enhancing Rural Skills

Enhanced Surgical Skills and Obstetrical Surgical Skills (ESS and OSS) are rural medicine's response to the needs of emergency labour and delivery. Emergency caesarean sections support a rural centre's ability to provide low-risk maternity care close to home. With additional training, ESS providers may also be able to provide local access to other procedures, including some basic hernia repairs, carpal tunnel release, and endoscopy. While ESS and OSS designations are the products of more recently defined training programs, there are many other family physicians who have acquired similar additional training to provide these services in their home communities.

RhPAP has been working to support rural ESS/OSS practitioners since 2018. In the past year, we have explored the development of a clinical coaching program which connects ESS physicians with obstetricians or general surgeons in their referral centre, modeling a robust program designed by the Rural Continuing Professional Development Program at the University of British Columbia in collaboration with the Rural Surgical and Obstetrical Network (RSON) in B.C. In order to create a sustainable network that continues to reap rewards beyond the lifetime of the project requires planning, we have been carefully developing a project plan that we can use to apply for grants. We are also exploring location opportunities for pilot projects and drawing on our relationships with Alberta's medical schools to support the development of this program under the umbrella of continuing medical education.

We are also working on a rural surgical workforce survey to roll out later this year. This survey will give us a better grasp of the provincial perspective of surgical and anesthesia providers who support the rural operating rooms across the province. Similar surveys have been done in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba before and have provided insights into how these physician and medical communities can be supported and enhanced.

We have also found opportunities to support existing and developing ESS and OSS conferences, courses, and networking opportunities, including the Rural and Remote SRPC Conference in Halifax, a crash course on emergency caesarean hysterectomy in Brooks, and the upcoming conferences for ESS and Endoscopy Skills in Banff.

If you have additional ideas on how to support rural operating rooms and maternity care, please contact us at ESS@rhpap.ca. 

We are exploring location opportunities for pilot projects and drawing on our relationships with Alberta's medical schools to support the development of this program under the umbrella of continuing medical education.



(Left to right) High Level graduates Ari Tik, Keegan Jessiman, Gracen Glover and Kim Panes pose with High Level IDA owners Cheryll and Jan Welke at the potluck celebration on July 26, 2019.

#Attraction & Retention

High Level graduates recognized for their dedication

Article & Photos: Jordan Maskell

Four High Level, Alberta high school graduates were recently honoured for their work at a local pharmacy.

The students from High Level Public School were recognized on Friday, July 26, 2019, with a potluck celebration at the High Level IDA pharmacy.

IDA owner, Jan Welke, insists on the importance of supporting high school students who are focussed on academics, especially those looking at professional careers in health care.

“There are not a lot of opportunities in a place like High Level to gain experience in [health-care] fields at that age,” explained Welke. “This is a great stepping stone and launching board for getting into the health-care profession. We kind of touch [on] everything in a pharmacy, whether they want to be a nurse, doctor, physiotherapist, pharmacist, or pharmacy technician.

“I wish I had this opportunity when I was younger.”

Gracen Glover is going to attend the University of Alberta in September 2019, where he will be taking pharmacology.

He says working at the pharmacy was a great experience to be involved in the community.

“It allows you to get a real insight into how the pharmacy operates,” explained Glover. “Pharmacists can really have more personal interactions [with patients] in smaller communities. It helps patients relate [to] or [be] more open with the pharmacist since there is more of a connection.”

Afterwards, he plans to apply to medical school and, hopefully, become a doctor.

“I’d love to come back up here to help out and just give back a bit,” said Glover.

Kim Panes will be attending the Nursing Program at the University of Alberta in the fall.

“I’d love to come back up here to help out and just give back a bit.”

— Gracen Glover

“[With] rural medicine or rural hospitals, you get more experience in different areas,” said Panes.

“Pharmacies play a bigger role in smaller communities, because more people know each other. When you go to a bigger city centre, they just know you by your last name or number; they don’t really know you as a person. Here in High Level, everybody is friendly and they know each other. There is more conversation, and people are more comfortable.”

Keegan Jessiman is pursuing a Bachelor of Science with a specialization in pharmacology.

“It was interesting with all the medication and how [it] can help patients,” Jessiman said. “Community pharmacies are very important, because they help people with so many different issues. If there wasn’t a pharmacy in High Level, people would have to drive really far distances. It’s just way more accessible.”

Although she is not continuing with a career in health care, Ari Tik said working at High Level IDA has been a worthwhile experience.

“It is nice to see the close relationships the staff has with patients,” said Tik. “You see the same people every day, so you get to know them very well.” 📌



#CPD

Brooks hosts life-saving Emergency Hysterectomy Course

Article & Photos: Britton Ledingham

Southern Alberta health professionals recently received life-saving training during a unique learning experience in Brooks.

A group of ten physicians and several nurses took part in a first-of-its-kind Emergency Caesarian Hysterectomy Course on May 3 at Brooks Health Centre. Sponsored by RhPAP and the Brooks & District Health Foundation, the session was a first for rural physicians and nurses in the Alberta Health Services (AHS) South Zone.

The full-day, team-focused course included classroom and hands-on instruction in the operating room, with simulations focused on performing emergency hysterectomies on artificial tissue.

Dr. Kristin Hoffmann led the training, with the goal of giving rural obstetrical surgery teams skills and knowledge that may help save the life of a female patient who is bleeding significantly during childbirth, putting her life at risk. Dr. Hoffman says the ability to perform an caesarian hysterectomy is an advanced skill for rural health professionals to possess, particularly if you are in a rural location with limited support.

“It’s good to get a basic skill set, that you at least know what to do, and get these patients out of here alive,” she explains.

“In having education like this, I think it’s really important for patient safety and for the staff to really feel that they’re advocating for their patients.”

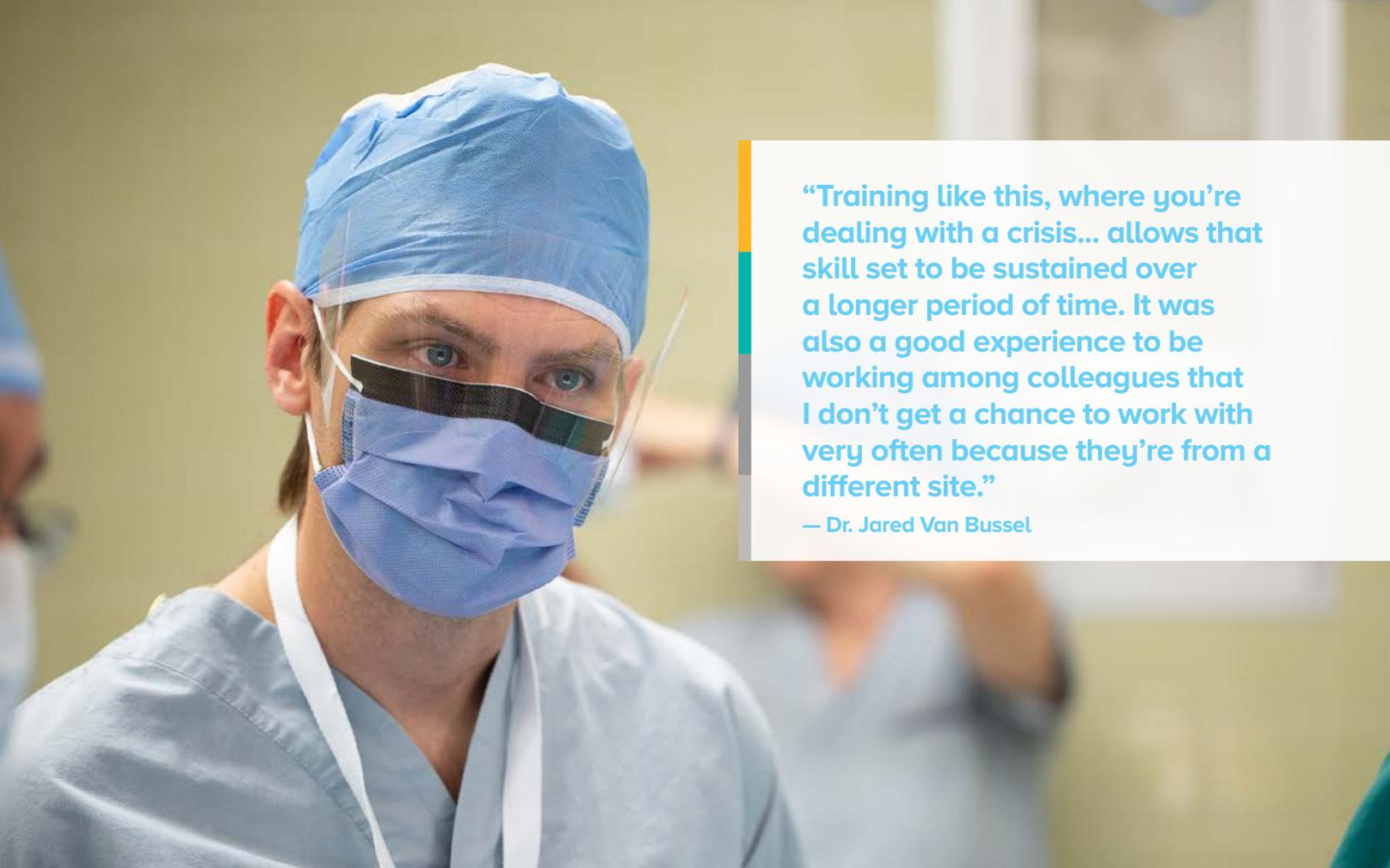
— Randi Galenzoski, RN

An obstetrician and gynecologist from Medicine Hat Hospital, Dr. Hoffmann has been working for a couple years with Brooks staff to upgrade their skills on high acuity, low occurrence events, such as emergency caesarian hysterectomies.

Randi Galenzoski, a registered nurse and clinical nurse educator for Medicine Hat and Brooks, says the experience that Dr. Hoffman offers is valuable.

“In having education like this, I think it’s really important for patient safety and for the staff to really feel that they’re advocating for their patients,” said Galenzoski.

Dr. Murtaza Amirali has experienced two emergency caesarian hysterectomies during his physician education and was thankful for the opportunity to learn from Dr. Hoffmann.



“Training like this, where you’re dealing with a crisis... allows that skill set to be sustained over a longer period of time. It was also a good experience to be working among colleagues that I don’t get a chance to work with very often because they’re from a different site.”

— Dr. Jared Van Bussel

(Opposite page) A group of ten physicians and several nurses took part in a first-of-its-kind Emergency Caesarian Hysterectomy Course on May 3 at Brooks Health Centre. Sponsored by RhPAP and the Brooks & District Health Foundation. (Above) Pincher Creek’s Dr. Jared Van Bussel

“To practise... with someone who does hysterectomies on a regular basis, and... give us some tips and take us through the learning process is huge,” said Dr. Amirali, a family physician with operative obstetrical skills at Medicine Hat Hospital.

Taber’s Dr. Wes Steed admitted emergency situations can be overwhelming in a rural setting.

“Anything you can do to feel a little bit less [overwhelmed] is a good thing,” he said, noting he cleared his schedule when he heard about the training opportunity. “This [course] benefits me by helping my confidence level in difficult situations, and that’s good for my patients.”

Pincher Creek’s Dr. Jared Van Bussel agreed.

“Training like this, where you’re dealing with a crisis... allows that skill set to be sustained over a longer period of time,” he said. “It was also a good experience to be working among colleagues that I don’t get a chance to work with very often because they’re from a different site.”

Dr. Erich van der Linde helped host the event in his home hospital.

“I think this [leads] to safer deliveries—better for moms, better for babies,” said Dr. van der Linde, thanking the Brooks & District Health Foundation and RhPAP for helping fund the artificial uteruses used in the operating rooms for the course.

He also noted having these skills available in a rural hospital reduces costs on the health-care system by reducing the need for patient transfers.

“I encourage physicians all over Alberta that [offers] enhanced surgical skills and obstetrical skills to participate in a course like this,” said Dr. van der Linde. 🏥

RhPAP is here to support Alberta’s health professionals

If you are a health professional practising in rural Alberta, RhPAP has a number of programs to support your future skills development.

From emergency medicine training to skills development and enrichment, RhPAP provides funding for a variety of courses and related expenses. For more information, visit rhpap.ca/cpd

Making themselves at home

Canadian medical graduates have fueled Sundre clinic's growth

Article: Jonathan Koch

Photos: Bobby Jones

When people around the world think of Canada, they imagine a place like Sundre.

The residents of this west-central Alberta community, nestled along the banks of the meandering Red Deer River, share their spectacular surroundings with the squirrels, deer, moose, and even the occasional black bear that roam amongst the majestic pines towering over the town.

Drawn to Sundre by the slower pace of life, physician couple, Michelle and Rob Warren, began their practice here and, later, opened a clinic in 2013. Inspired by their surroundings, the Warrens dubbed their clinic the Moose and Squirrel, and over the next six years, they set about growing its physician roster. Today, eight physicians practise at the clinic, all of whom were trained in Canadian medical schools, reflecting a growing trend that is seeing more Albertan and Canadian medical graduates going rural.

The Moose and Squirrel's success at attracting new physicians can be attributed to a number of factors, chief among them the exposure to rural practice provided by the Warrens. Alberta's two rural-focused streams of medical education also deserve of much of the credit as they allow medical students and residents to experience much of their training in rural Alberta. These streams were initially developed by RhPAP and the University of Alberta (U of A) and University of Calgary (U of C) in 2003 and are operated by the universities today.



Dr. Danielle Diaz checked out Sundre before she began checking up on her patients.

“When Rob and I decided to open the medical clinic here, our five-year plan was to add four or five physicians,” Dr. Michelle Warren explained. “We had the space available to build bigger, but didn’t want to right off the hop, because we weren’t sure how that would go. But right at the very beginning, both Rob and I enjoyed teaching, so we insisted on taking learners from both schools, the University of Alberta and [the] University of Calgary.”

Upon opening their clinic, the Warrens began welcoming learners from rural clerkship programs, which involve medical students spending several weeks of their undergraduate clinical training in a rural community.

They also welcomed students from the two-year post-graduate rural family medicine residency training programs: the University of Alberta’s Rural Alberta North (RAN) Program, based out of Red Deer and Grande Prairie; and the University of Calgary’s Rural Alberta South (RAS) Program, based out of Lethbridge and Medicine Hat.

This mentoring approach, introduced by the universities, and adopted by the Moose and Squirrel, made a big impression on medical graduates. It wasn’t long before resident physicians coming to Sundre for training didn’t want to leave. Today, of the eight physicians practising at the Moose and Squirrel, six of them were in rural clerkship programs as medical students, and seven are graduates of RAN and RAS.

“I think the proof is in the pudding.”

— Dr. Michelle Warren

Dr. Carly Crewe discovered Sundre after coming west from Ontario to do her medical degree at the University of Calgary. Although the community wasn’t her first choice for a clerkship, having the Doctors Warren as her primary preceptors proved to be “one of the huge turning points” in her life.

“The experience itself was amazing. I remember getting much more access to more hands-on experience, rather than a lot more of the academic stuff that my classmates in the city were getting,” Dr. Crewe recalls. “I remember feeling almost like I was maybe missing out on some of the academic teaching, but, then, when I would go back to do my urban rotations, realizing that I had so much more clinical acumen, hands-on experience, and comfort with things like casting, when some of my colleagues [did]n’t.

When people around the world think of Canada, they imagine a place like Sundre.



Dr. Jena Smith is one of eight physicians practising at the Moose and Squirrel who were trained in Alberta.

“My classmates hadn’t seen a cast yet, and I had put on three or four just from the increased exposure [I had] rurally.”

Following her rural clerkship, Dr. Crewe was confident she wanted to work rurally, so she returned to Sundre for her residency as part of the RAN Program. A four-month rotation at the newly opened Moose and Squirrel Clinic, working alongside Dr. Michelle, sold her on Sundre.

“I realized that what happens here in Sundre is really unique. And the type of practice that we have here is very unique. The level of commitment and kind of support for new grad[uate]s is exceptional in this community,” Dr. Crewe added.

She later did a second residency in Sundre in her second year, allowing her to transition into full-time practice in the community in which she wished to practise.

“I realized that what happens here in Sundre is really unique.”

— Dr. Carly Crewe

Like Dr. Crewe, Dr. Alanna Bowie wasn’t sure where she wanted to end up when she entered medical school at the University of Alberta.

For the Red Deer native, it was the opportunity to do her residency in her hometown through the RAN Program that cemented her decision to go rural.

“The Red Deer program had a really strong reputation for creating well-trained grad[uate]s... that were well equipped to practise,” Dr. Bowie explained. “I liked the one-on-one teaching and the small program size.”

Dr. Bowie also appreciated the continuity provided by the program; rather than cycling through different sites, she was able to focus on her learning and education and broaden her skill set within the same community.

“I think postgraduate training was really where the full-scope practice was reinforced. And the variety that you see day to day became very apparent and was something that I definitely wanted in my practice.”

Dr. Danielle Diaz is another Ontario-native who found her way to Sundre through a rural family medicine residency program. Dr. Diaz was introduced to rural practice in Drumheller through the University of Calgary Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship Program, a 36-week initiative that increases medical students’ exposure to general practice and rural medicine in sites outside of Calgary.

Her first experience in Sundre was as a RAS resident. Having resumed her residency following the birth of her first son, Dr. Diaz reconnected with a

familiar face, Dr. Rob Warren, who she knew from her time in Drumheller.

While it was a challenge to come back with a young child, Dr. Diaz says the mentoring and team-approach she found in Sundre as a resident convinced her and her husband, Mark, who was also a resident in the same program, to give rural medicine a shot.

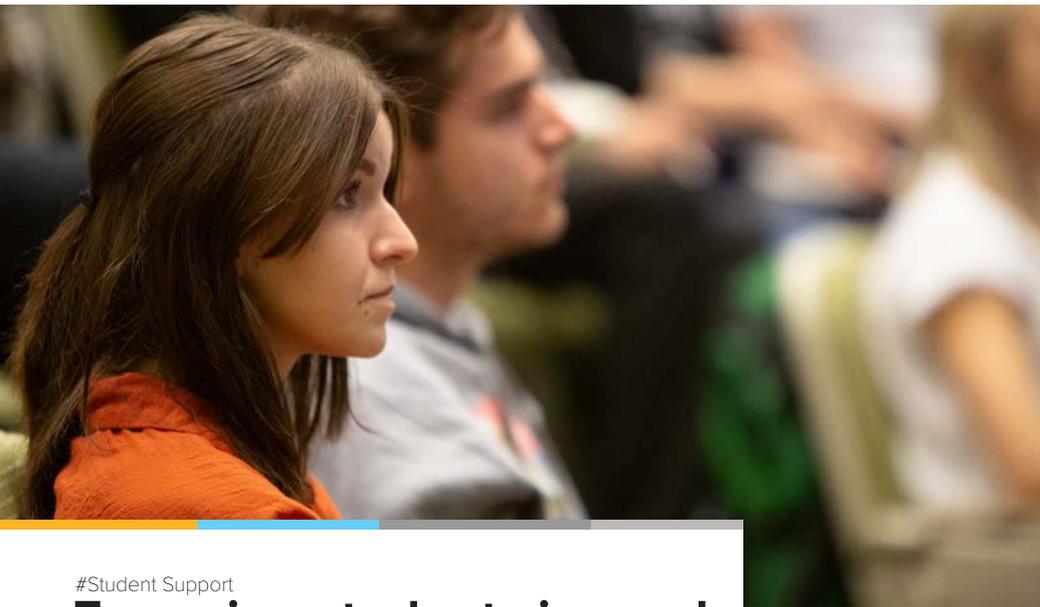
“As a husband-wife team thinking of doing rural medicine, one of the big [obstacles] for us was the lifestyle, we felt we’d never see each other [or] see our kids if we did rural medicine,” recalls Dr. Diaz. However, their experience in Sundre and the emphasis on work-life balance stressed by the Warrens, showed them that careers in rural medicine offered the lifestyle and support they were looking for.

As evidenced by her own clinic’s success, Dr. Michelle Warren believes the rural exposure and mentorship provided by rural clerkships and family medicine residencies is making a difference in getting new doctors into rural Alberta.

“I think the proof is in the pudding. [W]hen these programs started up, the number of physicians that were interested in rural medicine began to climb,” Dr. Warren explains. “As they began graduating these new physicians, they were going back to communities where they trained, where they lived long periods of their lives, where they could envision themselves being part of that community of medicine.”

Although these programs did not exist when Dr. Warren was in medical school, she acknowledges that it was a second-year rural rotation in Sundre as a resident that landed her and Dr. Rob in the West Country.

“[The Greenwood Clinic] approached me during that time to come back to Sundre when I finished,” Dr. Warren recalls. “I may not even be here if I hadn’t done a rural rotation [there].” 



#Student Support

Engaging students in rural mentorship opportunities

Article & Photos: Britton Ledingham

Over 100 first-year medical students were introduced to great possibilities during a recent Rural Mentorship Lunch.

Held on July 19, 2019 at the Foothills Medical Centre in Calgary, the Rural Health Professions Action Plan-sponsored event saw several students sign up for rural mentorship opportunities. These opportunities take place during weekend ER call shifts at hospitals in rural communities during students' first and second years of medical school.

"It's all about telling the students about all the great opportunities there are for them to train in rural Alberta," said Dr. Aaron Johnston, director of Distributed Learning and Rural Initiatives at the Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary.

The engaged students listened to talks from Dr. Johnston and RhPAP's Anne-Marie Piccinin, Shawna Banman, and Lara Harries in the theatre, before joining them for lunch, questions, and conversations in the hall outside.

"The questions show that they have already thought about rural," Johnston added gladly. "We'll get these guys signed up for rural shadowing and mentorship opportunities."

Taelina Andreychuk affirms Dr. Johnston's belief. The medical student, who is already educated as a psychiatric nurse, has a strong interest in working in remote Indigenous communities.

"I do feel like [there's] an inequity that people... experience in these communities," said Andreychuk. "As a physician, I would love the opportunity to go into these communities and do what I can to improve the access to health care and ultimately the health outcomes for these communities."

She enjoyed the Rural Mentorship Lunch, which occurred just two weeks into her medical schooling.

"[It] really makes me feel like I am in a good place for myself, and that, hopefully, I will be able to pursue what I'm wanting to do... right [from] the get-go," said Andreychuk.

Her peer, Jenny Krahn, is entering medicine after completing a Ph.D. in project management and working in the business world.

"[It] really makes me feel like I am in a good place for myself, and that, hopefully, I will be able to pursue what I'm wanting to do."

— Taelina Andreychuk

"I feel like rural medicine gives us... the opportunity to see how things work in a slightly different environment," said Krahn. "I thought both seeing the breadth of opportunity that a rural environment offered, as well as how [rural] teams work together, would be particularly important and interesting."

She sees rural medicine as an important consideration for new students.

"The [rural] team seems fantastic, engaging, available, and passionate about what they do," said Krahn. "I think anytime you work with a team like that, or you listen to them talk about the work that they do and why it's important, it's inspiring."

Jovey Sharma was equally enthused to be in the crowd. He was born and raised in the city, but has had friends speak highly about the importance of rural medicine.

Already having a Master's in Public Health, he's learned the "role that rural medicine plays in society".

"I was very glad that we had this session today. I was able to [get answers to my] questions... a few of these have been kind of ringing the back of my head," said Sharma.

For more information about the RhPAP Mentorship Program, visit rhpap.ca/mentorship. 

Calm head during emergency confirms medicine in volunteer's future

Article: Lorena Franchuk

A stint as a medical volunteer at Big Valley Jamboree five years ago was all 20-year-old Allyson Wrubleski needed to know she was headed on the right path into medicine.

The Augustana Campus of University of Alberta undergraduate spent much of her debut year at the Jamboree practising some of her first-aid training with a mentor. That meant a lot of driving a backboard/stretchers-equipped Gator golf cart to patients around the Camrose-area country music festival site. But one particular incident that weekend — an anaphylactic case — determined her future career.

“The patient had eaten something they were allergic to and their airway was closing. The paramedic was pushing medications. I got the oxygen mask on [the patient] as I was instructed to do, and, at the end of it, we got the patient shipped off,” she recalled.

“I expected myself to be frazzled and high stress, but I was so calm the whole time and afterwards. It was a really cool feeling to know, in this chaos, I could maintain a calm head and think through things. That case solidified for me that I have the capacity to lead and manage high-stress situations for the betterment of patient care.”

For Wrubleski, who started her third year of medical school shortly after her fifth Big Valley Jamboree this year, successfully diagnosing a bicep tear and an acromioclavicular (top of the shoulder) joint sprain were highlights at the 2019 festival.

“We learned last year [in school] how to do a shoulder exam and it worked. This patient [at the Jamboree] had these findings and I successfully diagnosed it.

“That was super exciting to me to see that these two years of med school, as hard and long as they were, paid off. It was a small little check mark.”

Wrubleski enjoys reconnecting with the medical centre team each year at the Jamboree, because of its mix of long-time volunteers and others stepping up for the first time.

“It’s a hoot,” said Wrubleski, of the volunteer-operated main clinic and two satellite clinics on the festival site.

“We’re out there to provide medical care, but we’re also out there to enjoy ourselves to some extent. It’s meant to be a good mixture and (leaders Greg Clarkes and Dr. Chris Nichol) do a really good job of making that happen.

Wrubleski encourages those who have the training and the interest to come on out.

“BVJ [Big Valley Jamboree] definitely shaped the fact that I’m super interested in emergency medicine. I don’t know if I would have considered it beforehand had I not done BVJ.” 📌

Introducing a new way to stay up to date

This article is taken from the first issue of the Rural Health Beat, RhPAP's new weekly e-newsletter that features the latest good news and innovations from the world of rural health care, plus a curated selection of rural health news and stories from Alberta and beyond. Subscribe now at rhpap.ca/subscribe



#RhPAP

Meet Cheryl Welke, RhPAP's new rural consultant for the north west

It is with great honour that I accepted the part-time position with RhPAP as the far north west zone Rural Community Consultant. The wonderful people I have met so far have made it very easy to envision the possibilities this position can bring to north west.

As a home-grown north western Albertan, I am very proud of the excellent ingenuity of the professionals who work in our area. As many who have been there can attest to who have been here, the large geographical territory that we live in is full of many benefits as well as challenges.

With RhPAP as my guide, I hope to make connections for our region that continue to enhance services while appreciating the uniqueness of our people.

Most of all, I appreciate the nature of our territory with its very distinct and beautiful cultures that make it a wonderful place to live and work.

Hiy Hiy

— Cheryl Welke



The gang's all here

This summer the entire RhPAP team, both Board and staff, came together from all over the province to discuss new ways to help rural Albertans keep health care close to home. Moving into 2020 and beyond, RhPAP is excited to continue to serve the needs of rural Alberta because ... #RuralHealthMatters.

rhpap.ca

About /Rural Health Matters

Rural Health Matters (RHM) is published four times a year by the Rural Health Professions Action Plan (RhPAP).

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rhpap.ca > [resources](#).

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