

Alberta Rural Health Quarterly

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Brooks to host the 2018 RhPAP
Rural Community Attraction
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Stepping It Up In Brooks

Brooks Aqueduct. Photo courtesy of the City of Brooks.



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Rhapsody Awards



Celebrate rural health
excellence in Alberta

Rural Health Professions Action Plan (RhPAP) invites rural Albertans to submit nominations for the 2018 RhPAP Rhapsody Awards in one of the following categories:

Rural Alberta Physician of Distinction

Rural Alberta Community Health
Professional Attraction and Retention

New in 2018: Rural Alberta
Health-care Heroes (Individual or Team)

*Have health-care professionals
made a big difference in your
rural community?*

*Has your rural community
successfully used a new
approach for attracting
and retaining health-care
professionals?*

rhapsody /n/ "An effusively
enthusiastic or ecstatic
expression of feeling" -
Oxford English Dictionary

Submit your nomination by **June 15**

To read more information and to download nomination forms visit:

www.rhpap.ca/rhapsody

RhPAP is working hard to achieve equal capital and human resource investments for our rural areas, and we support the tireless efforts of rural Albertans who strive to attract health-care professionals, services, and equipment to their communities.

RhPAP has worked extensively to advance positive rural health-care delivery and lifestyle to the forefront of social media, as the next generation of rural health professionals use social media as a key way of learning.

We are your rural advocates

Update from the Board Chair

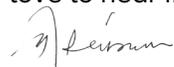
Despite most evidence to the contrary, winter's frosty abundance is slowly receding, as a chorus of birdsong and babbling brooks herald the return of spring.

While the season's rejuvenating force brings new life to the country, clinical outcomes for orthopaedic, cardiovascular, and maternity in our nation's rural and remote areas continue to be worse than in urban centres across Canada.

RhPAP is working hard to achieve equal capital and human resource investments for our rural areas, and we support the tireless efforts of rural Albertans who strive to attract health-care professionals, services, and equipment to their communities.

Our Board of Directors come from backgrounds as diverse as our province. Our members represent rural communities from across Alberta, and bring their expertise as nurses, physicians, health-care administrators, and rural advocates to the table when we inform the government of the needs and priorities in comprehensive rural health-care delivery.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at youropinionmatters@rhpap.ca if there is anything you would like to share about rural health workforce issues in your area. We love to hear from you.



Dr. Bert Reitsma

Your opinion matters

Update from the Executive Director

Our renewed RhPAP is having a great year helping our rural partners. The number of communities our community development team is supporting is up four-fold, and the same increase is occurring in the demands for professional development from the rural physician community. We have also increased the number of properties we rent to house medical students and residents, and opened these properties up to other health professionals to accommodate their rural learning. At the same time, RhPAP has worked extensively to advance positive rural health-care delivery and lifestyle to the forefront of social media, as the next generation of rural health professionals use social media as a key way of learning.

Our expansion on all these fronts stems from your support, belief in, and trust of, the RhPAP team. Thank-you!

Going into the next fiscal year, our goal is to continue doing what we do well, while developing ways to better recognize rural health-care professionals in the manner we have supported rural physicians. In this regard, I would greatly appreciate hearing from you. Your ideas and opinions matter. They really do. I invite you to email me your thoughts at youropinionmatters@rhpap.ca.

Again, on behalf of our Board and staff, please accept my sincerest thanks. We truly consider it a privilege to serve rural Alberta!



Bernard C. Anderson



(Left) Dr. Chris Nichol examines a patient; (Above) With students from the Young Medical Minds program; (Below) Enjoying dinner with his wife, Susan, and daughter, Hannah.



Dr. Chris Nichol: 2017 recipient of the RhPAP Rural Physician Award of Distinction

Camrose family physician, Dr. Chris Nichol, never pictured himself in a rural practice as he worked his way through medical school.

Neither did his then soon-to-be wife, Susan.

“I was born and raised in a big city,” said Dr. Nichol, during a break from his hectic schedule at the Smith Clinic in Camrose. “When I got into med school, we were asked to do rural electives. In residency, it became mandatory and that’s when I kind of opened my eyes to rural medicine.”

“At first, I was not too keen on it,” admitted wife Susan, who grew up in the Vancouver area. “But I knew it was something he was interested in and I thought, ‘well, maybe I could do it — if it’s not too far away from a Walmart.’”

It’s been 18 years since Dr. Nichol and Susan stayed for a few weeks in a small, on-call physician structure at the St. Mary’s Hospital parking lot in Camrose. It was a successful test drive of the community as a place to set up practice. “We thought we’d give it a whirl,” said Susan. “The town was really pretty and it was such a beautiful couple of weeks when we were here.”

Colleagues and members of the community quickly became their family away from home as Dr. Nichol built his career over the next two decades, establishing roots in the community southeast of Edmonton.

The 2017 recipient of the RhPAP Rural Physician Award of Distinction, Dr. Nichol is modest about his long list of achievements.

“It means I’m probably doing a good job,” he chuckles when asked about the honour. “It’s great to be recognized for things that you do, but, certainly, this is not my award. I work with a bunch of great people, and, without those great teams, no one would recognize the work that I do. This award is as much theirs as it is mine.”

He also credits Susan, and her colour-coded calendar, for keeping him on track with commitments for work, family, band, and volunteering. “She keeps me organized; without her my life would probably be a mess,” he confessed.

His colleagues and community leaders maintain that Dr. Nichol’s work has been instrumental in enhancing health care in the area, as well as improving life in general for the entire Camrose region.

“As a rural physician, you need to be part of a community as well as part of a hospital,” said St. Mary’s Hospital emergency room manager Michelle Solverson, who has worked with him for

“It’s great to be recognized for things that you do, but, certainly, this is not my award. I work with a bunch of great people and without those great teams, no one would recognize the work that I do. This award is as much theirs as it is mine.” — Dr. Chris Nichol

several years. “Dr. Nichol has really embraced Camrose. He gives it 100 per cent and I really commend him for that.”

Over the years, Dr. Nichol has played an integral role in setting up the Camrose Primary Care Network (PCN) and currently serves as its lead physician. He’s been a key supporter of the heart and stroke clinic in Camrose. He has worked with the Canadian College of Emergency Medical Services to establish and service an on-site “hospital” during the Big Valley Jamboree music festival. He has also taught a program for junior high students to discourage drinking and driving, and participates on numerous boards and committees.

Two years ago, Dr. Nichol launched the Young Medical Minds (YMM) Program to give local grade eight students an opportunity to explore various aspects of health care in the hope that some may pursue it as a future career and possibly work in Camrose.

“He is the epitome of a Primary Care Network champion,” said Stacey Strilchuk, executive director for the Camrose PCN. “He will go into the community and listen to patients, stakeholders, and community partners, and get a really good understanding of what is being asked, not just from physicians, but from a multi-disciplinary team approach.”

Strilchuk said Dr. Nichol’s vision in the mid-2000s of a PCN offering team-based care was “certainly pioneering in the type of model the province is now wanting us to achieve.”

Leanne Grant, chair of the Camrose Attraction and Retention Committee, and AHS area director for Camrose, Flagstaff and Beaver County, said Dr. Nichol’s contributions have had a positive impact on the community.

“Dr. Nichol is passionate not only about community but best practice,” she said. “Beyond doing a great job as a family physician, he spends a lot of time educating himself and building relationships. There are just so many projects that he takes on that are similar to other physicians, but one of the things we’ve noticed, he’s just an innovator at looking how to get rural

health expanded with the resources we have. I’m not sure when he sleeps, but he’s very passionate about the things that he does.”

Dr. Nichol’s colleagues also see his dedication to his patients, and desire to mentor every day in the clinic.

“He’s very encouraging. He can get you onboard with anything if he says the right words,” said Amanda MacDonald, his nursing assistant. “He’s just the best down-to-earth doctor.”

Smith Clinic patient care coordinator, health coach, and prevention practitioner, Maya Rathnabalu, concurs.

“He’s very professional and I think people feel like they can trust him. I remember when he would teach me something, and he would hold the light for me, even though he was the physician. It’s those little things that really make a difference, although he may not realize it. It’s just part of his personality.”

Dr. Nichol’s enthusiasm has also rubbed off on his 14-year-old son Chad. He joined his dad in the YMM Program, and has his mind set on becoming a radiologist.

As a child, Chad always jumped at the chance to skip television on Saturday mornings to tag along with dad during hospital rounds.

“You learn a lot being a physician’s son,” he said. “Being around him made it very interesting. He knows the people he works with, it’s not just a one-and-done type of thing with him. He’s a great physician.”

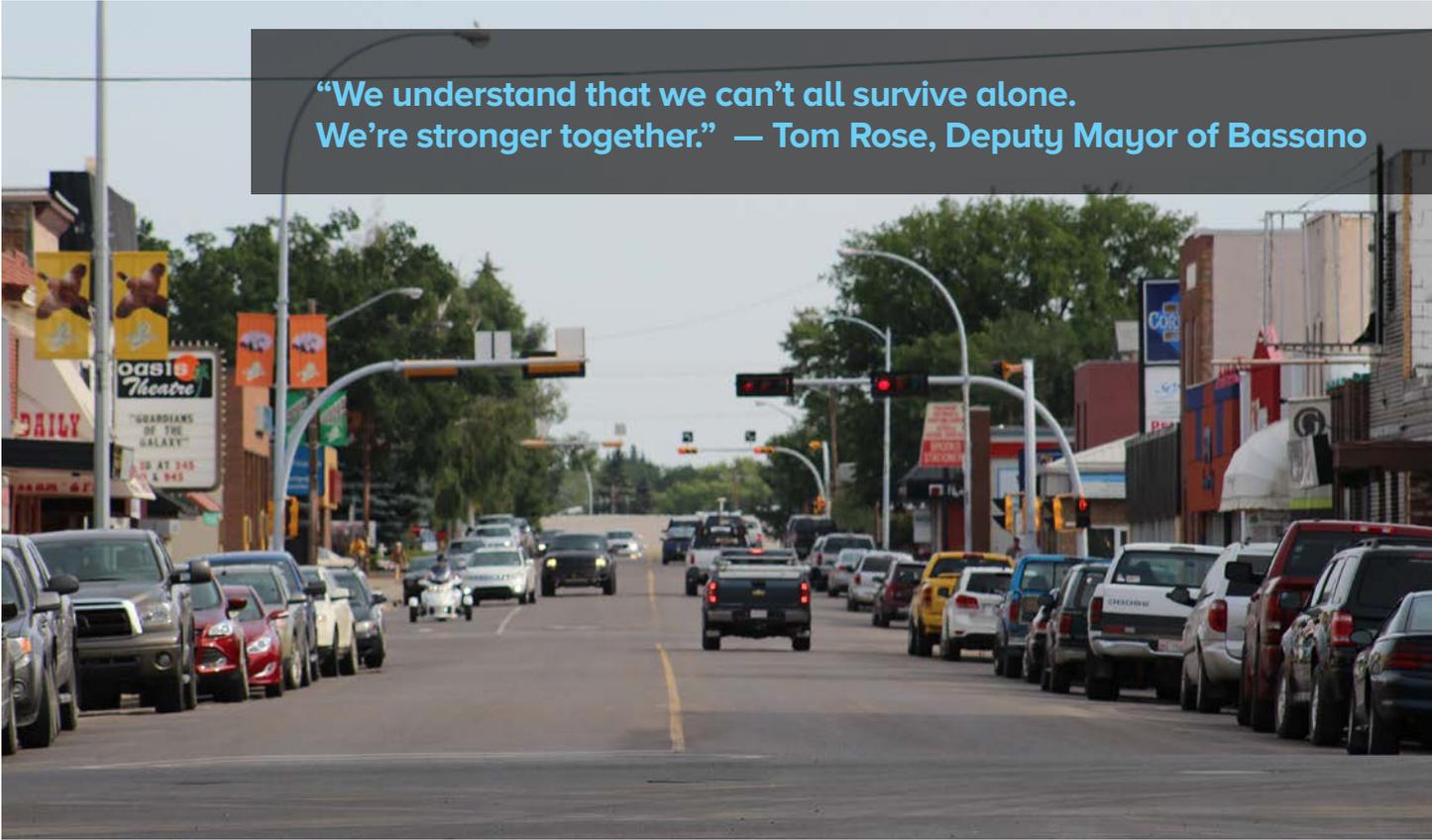
His 16-year-old daughter, Hannah, is proud of her father, and sees the positive role he plays in the community.

Tuesday nights are reserved for Dr. Nichol and his wife, a longstanding date night which began in their single years. He’s a trumpet player for the Camrose Community Band, while Susan plays trombone. Afterwards, they enjoy catching a movie when possible, but work is always not far from his mind.

One year, he was scheduled to work in the ER the same night as he was performing in a local music festival. Dr. Nichol’s performance was running behind and, in the meantime, his pager went off. He ended up heading to the ER rather than the stage.

“That’s just the way it is,” he said. “The band played on.”

Article and photographs by Lorena Franchuk, RhPAP



**“We understand that we can’t all survive alone.
We’re stronger together.” — Tom Rose, Deputy Mayor of Bassano**

Downtown Brooks, Alberta

Collaboration between Brooks and the County of Newell makes them a champion in attraction and retention

In 2009, Brooks was in crisis. The health centre in this community of 13,000 residents in Alberta’s southeast had lost its obstetric services. Lacking enough qualified physicians to run the department, expecting mothers had to drive over an hour to Medicine Hat, or two hours to Calgary. That’s a long journey if you’re in labour, and one that became even longer if the roads were covered in snow. The closure shook community leaders and caused a lot of angst in the region.

Barry Morishita, Mayor of Brooks, was one of those personally affected by the closure of obstetric services. His daughter and son-in-law were about to finish their university education, and were reconsidering whether or not they should return to Brooks to start their careers. His daughter told him: “I’ve got to have a place where I can have access to health care. I want to start a family.”

With motivation like that, communities in the region joined together to find a solution. Representatives for the City of Brooks, the County of Newell, the Town of Bassano, and the villages of Duchess and Rosemary, met together as the Joint Services Committee, and decided they needed to be more proactive in the attraction of physicians.

Step one was to attract more doctors. RhPAP was there to help with toolkits and advice on how to do just that. Joint Services sought input from local physicians. The mayor and other committee members started hosting tours for prospective physicians to promote the many amenities in the area.

“We understand that we can’t all survive alone,” says Tom Rose, Deputy Mayor of Bassano. “We’re stronger together.”

Fast forward to today, the obstetrics department at the hospital is flourishing.

Brooks physician, Dr. Ziets Hendriks, says it’s a safer environment for patients and physicians because patients have access to a physician who is well rested, and who is dedicated to obstetrical services.

“We actually have two physicians on staff for obstetrics every day now,” explains Dr. Hendriks. “One that does low risk and one that does high risk; there’s always a secondary physician that helps cover, where previously we didn’t have much back up.”

Dr. Erich van der Linde adds: “We currently have four physicians that have surgical capacity to do emergency C sections. We have four physicians trained to do GP-Anesthetic services.”

As a result, Brooks has grown from nine family physicians to a full complement of 15.

“I was so surprised by how welcoming Canadians were, from patients, to the community, to nursing staff, to other physicians. They made us feel so welcome here.”

— Dr. Anchene Harris

“We’ve got a great working relationship,” says Dr. van der Linde. “We support each other. I know in the middle of the night, if I have a problem with a patient, I can call friends to come and help me.”

Even the four medical clinics in Brooks have embraced a collaborative approach. In the past, each clinic hired individually. Now, they’ve formed a recruitment committee comprised of one physician from each clinic. “We work with the Mayor and the committee to do site visits with potential new physicians, make sure they have a vehicle, that there’s housing available for them, and that we showcase our community appropriately,” says Dr. van der Linde.

Dr. Anchene Harris visited Brooks in 2016 from South Africa and was impressed.

“I was so surprised by how welcoming Canadians were, from patients, to the community, to nursing staff, to other physicians. They made us feel so welcome here,” says Anchene, who is now a family physician at the Centennial Health Clinic in Brooks. “When we got into town, and we just

started working, we got this whole hamper [filled with gifts from city and county merchants]. I never expected something like that.”

With obstetric services back in place, Mayor Barry Morishita’s daughter and son-in-law did come back to Brooks to start their professional careers.

“The community needs those type of programs (obstetrics) to make it attractive. For all the professionals, for any job seekers, for people who are establishing industry here, health care and access to it is very important,” Morishita added.

Of course, retention of physicians is just as important as attraction. Joint Services thanks physicians for the work they do in the community on a regular basis with gift baskets and tickets to art events. Plus, they stay in touch.

“At least annually, we meet with the doctors in a group setting. We invite them to come out to supper with us so that we can communicate with them and get their opinions and ideas,” says Molly Douglass, Reeve for the County of Newell.

One area where some of the young physicians identified room for improvement was the tennis courts, which had fallen into disrepair. City officials didn’t think there was much interest in tennis anymore, but once they heard the doctors’ concerns, they resurfaced the courts. They soon discovered that not only were the physicians using the courts, but many other residents were also using them as well.

Dr. Anchene appreciates these efforts.

“I think it’s very important to have a committee in place that is recognized to be our voice if we have concerns, if we have troubles, or if there is something we want to see improved in the community.”

In recognition of their efforts to restore obstetrics services to Brooks, and the ongoing regional approach towards workforce attraction and retention, the Joint Services Committee, representing the City of Brooks and the County of Newell, has been selected as the recipient of the 2017 RhPAP Alberta Rural Community Physician Attraction and Retention Award.

“They stepped up and said ‘we need to take care of our doctors so that they can take care of us’. And it makes you feel appreciated,” adds Dr. Hendriks.

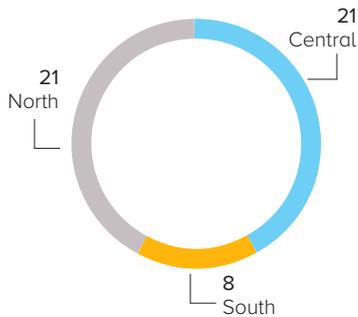
“It means a great deal that other parts of the province are starting to see what we do down here. It’s working,” says Molly Douglass. “Thank you to RhPAP for their involvement in all of our successes.”

The 2017 Rural Community award will be presented to the Joint Services Committee at the RhPAP 2018 Community Conference in Brooks on April 10-12, 2018.

Visit www.rhpap.ca for more details.

Article by Bobby Jones, RhPAP

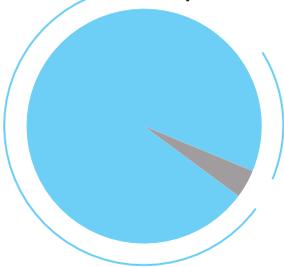
**A&R Committee
Distribution in Alberta**



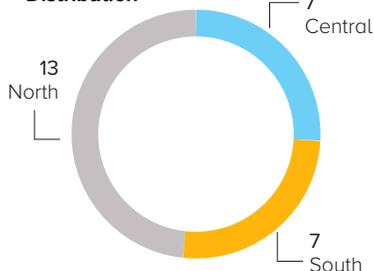
Housing Breakdown

University of Alberta	
150	Students
75	Residents
50	RCI Residents
22	ICC Clerks
15	Rural Residents
23	Nursing Students
University of Calgary	
150	Students
75	Residents
150	RCI Residents
22	LIC
15	Rural Residents

**96% of Locum
Requests Filled**



**RhPAP Event & Presentation
Distribution**



To help rural Alberta have and sustain the right number of rural health practitioners in the right places, offering the right services, through community and professional development programs, services, and evidence-informed advocacy.

RhPAP builds community capacity to attract and retain health care professionals and their families.

50 Attraction & Retention (A&R) Committees

Actively supported by RhPAP

9 New

A&R Committees in 2017

8 Re-engaged

A&R Committees in 2017

115 Meetings

A&R Committee Meetings Attended in 2017

750+ Medical Students & Residents Housed

Annually

129 leases in 50 rural communities

To provide residents with accommodations when they are in rural Alberta

65 Bursaries, Awards, and Scholarships

Presented to Medical Students Since 2014

3 Student Support Programs

One bursary, one award, one scholarship

RhPAP increases program participation and expands the number of remote rural participants.

14 Skills Events

Held for high school students (six days) and post-secondary students (eight weekends)

884+ Shadowing Opportunities for Students

Since 2014

248 Physicians Shadowed

From 2013 - 2016

120 Physicians in Skills Enrichment

or Continuing Medical Education (CME) since 2014

1,143/1,182 Weekend Locum

Assignments vs Requests from 2013 - 2016

RhPAP expands networking and liaison capacity between communities with the goal of better addressing health workforce issues.

27 Events & Presentations

To partners and communities in 2017

100+ New Stakeholder Connections

Developed in 2017



RhPAP brings a stronger voice to rural health workforce issues and accomplishments.

@AlbertaRhPAP2017

RhPAP Social Media Statistics



1,281 Followers
395 Tweets
+123,000 Impressions



14 New Communities Profiled
42 Videos Uploaded
+36,000 Views (53% increase)



35 Videos Uploaded
503 Likes (88% increase)
+96,000 Reach

RhPAP Review 2017

Monthly eNewsletter

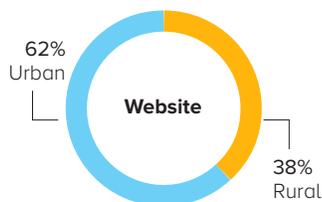


2,200 Subscribers

Sign up at rhpap.ca/subscribe

By Alberta Location

User traffic by location (urban/rural)





“Take a pair of gloves and pass them around. Trauma is bloody and we don’t want to be exposed to blood or anything else that comes out of the body.”

— Dr. Chris Nichol

Young Medical Minds Program highlights medical options for rural students

Dr. Chris Nichol doesn’t mince words with a dozen attentive Grade 8 students as he leads an examination of a patient named “Stan”, an animatronic manikin, who in this scenario has just been taken by ambulance to a simulated emergency room (ER) in Camrose following a snowboarding accident.

The teens are part of the group called Young Medical Minds (YMM), who spend six evenings learning about the various professions involved in health care. For two hours a week, they experience the various steps taken during a trauma with Stan — including emergency medical response, ER, diagnostics, treatment and recovery.

“Children need to know there are options for them even when they work in rural areas,” said Carol Breitzkreutz, program

facilitator for the Young Medical Minds Educational Institute, and health facilitator with Alberta Health Services (AHS). “This program opens up a wide variety of career options for them that they have never even considered. Some are even inspired to get serious about their academics so they can go on and take more training.”

The youth program was launched in 2015 after Dr. Nichol approached Breitzkreutz with the idea of reaching out to local young people to get them interested in the health-care field. As a junior high student himself, Dr. Nichol had the opportunity to attend a science program, and was so impressed it stuck with him over the years.

“One of the things I remember most was playing with liquid nitrogen, and the (Smith Clinic) staff think I’m crazy because I still like to play with liquid nitrogen,” said Dr. Nichol with a twinkle in his eye.

The family doctor’s enthusiasm has piqued Grade 8 student Alex Hall’s interest. Fake blood, and the opportunity to suture chicken thighs, gave Alex a good sampling of what’s to come in his future career as a surgeon.

“Normally, you’d have to wait to do these things when you head out to university. It’s cool when you’re 13, 14, 15 and you get the chance to

Somebody trained us and took the time to show us and to encourage us in our careers. I'm hoping to give back just a little bit.

— Linda Postma, RN

do this awesome program and experience it for yourself. Dr. Nichol is a great role model.”

Students apply to take part in the free program which has been funded with grants and donations in kind from groups such as the Health Science Association of Alberta, Rotary Club of Camrose, University of Alberta Augustana Campus, and St. Mary's Hospital. Augustana nursing students also take part assisting the younger participants, with volunteers from a variety of health-care groups lending a hand. The program wraps up at Augustana campus, so students can see that they are able to begin their course work right in their own backyard if they choose.

Program volunteer, Linda Postma, RN, an Advanced Care Paramedic and Clinical Educator for AHS EMS Central Zone, believes it is vital to maintain a successful health-care field in the coming years.

“Somebody trained us and took the time to show us and to encourage us in our careers. I'm hoping to give back just a little bit. [Youth] are our future: they're the ones who are going to be looking after us and we need to look after them.”

Dr. Nichol also enjoys sharing his health-care knowledge with the younger generation, and hopes they'll one day venture down that path.

“It's great working out here in rural Alberta,” he said. “If they end up in a rural setting, that's great, and if they go to the big city, that's fine as well. As a physician, I'd love to see physicians, but I'd be happy to see X-ray or laboratory techs, nurses, or anyone in the health-care field.”

Article and photographs by Lorena Franchuk, RhPAP

Deciding between urban and rural practice

Do your research on rural versus urban before deciding where to set up practice or beginning your first health-care position.

That's the advice of Dr. Chris Nichol, who switched gears when he set up his practice in Camrose 18 years ago.

He was originally leaning toward settling in Calgary, but instead headed to the central Alberta city after spending a brief stint working there.

“As I got through residency, I saw that rural medicine was more appealing to me,” he said. “I think everyone gets worried about rural practice, and the fact they are going to see their patients on every street corner. Certainly, it was a concern of mine when I moved here, but it's actually never been a real issue.”

“Every once in a while I see a patient who asks me about test results, but most of the time they are being friendly. Most of my interactions with patients outside the office or hospital setting are more social situations, where we exchange pleasantries and talk about the weather; it's really not about medicine.”

Dr. Nichol has also had an opportunity to really get to know colleagues, staff, and friends.

“It has probably been the greatest reward,” he said. “The people out here, we get to know each other's strengths and weaknesses, and when we build teams, we have a better understanding of that. Everyone here seems so passionate about what they do, so we make good teams and make good things happen.”

Although he's a definite proponent of rural medicine — and in particular Camrose — he maintains it's best for people to experience rural practice and make their own choice.

“I would never have considered rural medicine,” he said, referring back to his start in medical school. “We were told we had to do rural electives. That really changed my vision and that's why I'm here.”

“There's lots of opportunities here. It's the best community in Alberta.” — LF



RhPAP Board of Directors (left-right, front row) Sherri di Lallo (CARNA), Dr. Evan Lundall (AHS), Linda Humphreys (Member-at-large), Dr. Bert Reitsma (Board Chair, AMA); (left-right, back row) Bernard Anderson (RhPAP Executive Director), Dr. Gavin Parker (AMA), Dr. Rob Warren (Board Vice Char, AMA), Andrew Neuner (HQCA), Al Kemmere (RMA), Dr. John Gillett (AHS).
Not pictured: Dr. John O'Connor.

RhPAP adds three new rural health care perspectives to its Board of Directors

RhPAP is pleased to welcome three new members representing rural Alberta, registered nurses, and quality health care organizations, to the RhPAP Board of Directors.

Representatives of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA), the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA), and the Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) have added their support and expertise to RhPAP, and its efforts to assist rural Alberta communities trying to achieve greater access to health care.

On January 18, 2018, RhPAP Board Chair, Dr. Bert Reitsma, officially welcomed Al Kemmere (President, RMA), Sherri di Lallo (Provincial Councilor, CARNA), and Andrew Neuner (Chief Executive Officer, HQCA) to the RhPAP Board of Directors, which also includes representatives from Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Medical Association, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta.

According to Dr. Reitsma, the expanded board reflects RhPAP's expanded mandate and the organization's transition since 2017 from a rural physician support program, to a rural allied health professionals and community development agency.

"Adding these voices will not only strengthen our efforts to improve access to health care in rural communities, it will also help us ensure the right supports are being utilized in the right places," adds Dr. Reitsma.

Update

On March 15, Edmonton-based physician, Dr. John O'Connor, was welcomed to the RhPAP Board as the new representative of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta. More details about Dr. O'Connor will follow in a future edition.



Dr. Kelly Burak speaks at the Choosing Wisely Alberta Symposium

Choosing Wisely Alberta Symposium promotes healthy conversations between physicians and patients

Key health-care stakeholders from every corner of Alberta gathered in Calgary on March 7 for the Choosing Wisely Alberta (CWA) Symposium.

The conference brought together more than 100 people to focus on health-care quality improvement, and to highlight initiatives of Choosing Wisely Canada, CWA's national counterpart.

Choosing Wisely is a campaign to help clinicians and patients engage in conversations about unnecessary tests and treatments and make smart and effective care choices. Event moderator, Dr. Kelly Burak, said the third-annual event was successful in strengthening relationships between allied medical professionals.

"I was really pleased with the day," said Burak, the Associate Dean of Continuing Medical Education and Professional Development with the University of Calgary's Cumming School of Medicine.

"It was evident from the symposium that there is a big opportunity for Choosing Wisely to contribute to the integration effort that is going on in Alberta."

The conference drew representation from the Alberta Medical Association (AMA), Physician Learning Program (PLP), College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA), Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA), Rural Health Professions Action Plan (RhPAP), Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH), Strategic Clinic Networks (SCNs), and Primary Care Networks (PCNs), as well as medical students and patient representatives.

One of the major themes of the day identified by the over 20 speakers and moderators was the opioid crisis.

The discussion was informed by Choosing Wisely Canada releasing the Opioid Wisely campaign on March 1. The campaign encourages thoughtful conversation between clinicians and patients to reduce harms associated with opioid prescribing.

Dr. Burak said a key part of the discussions was helping physicians interact with the data available to them. With that in mind, 22 posters focused on quality care delivery along with research and evaluation groups, were placed around the conference hall, with time designated for attendees to interact with each other and the material.

"I really hope [the discussion] allowed people to come away with new thoughts and new ideas of doing things differently, and hopefully new collaborations," said Dr. Burak, who is also the co-lead of the PLP.

Bernard Anderson, Executive Director of RhPAP, spoke to the inclusiveness of this event as it was well designed for all allied health professionals. He also noted the opioid crisis in rural Alberta is a major concern for rural communities as people who are opioid dependent may have greater difficulty accessing needed services.

Moderator Eileen Patterson said the symposium was successful in advancing conversations between organizations in primary, specialty, long term and acute care.

"They're intended to promote healthy conversations between physicians and their patients," said Patterson. "They're also designed to promote practice reflection by providers and teams."

Dr. Burak echoed the words of Dr. Denise Campbell-Scherer, Associate Dean of Life Long Learning at the University of Alberta, and Co-Lead of the PLP, who stated that those present at the symposium were early adopters of change.

"Now, our challenge is getting these people in the room to go out and convince their colleagues and patients to join in the movement."

Article and photographs by Britton Ledingham, RhPAP

‘I had never seen a doctor in blue jeans’



Dr. Gavin Parker teaches Judo with his spouse, Jennifer (r), and daughter, Mia (l), and sons, Sebastian and Garrett (not pictured).

Dr. Gavin Parker is a true advocate for rural health.

A general physician at the Associate Clinic in Pincher Creek, Dr. Parker, or Gavin, as he prefers to be called, is also serving his fifth year as a board member for the Rural Health Professions Action Plan (RhPAP).

“I owe a lot of what I have to this organization,” said Dr. Parker, 39, who credits RhPAP for introducing him to the idea of practising in rural Alberta.

Gavin was studying at University of Alberta Medical School in the early 2000s when he took a trip to Hinton for an RhPAP (formerly Rural Physicians Action Plan) medical skills event.

After meeting a doctor in denim-jeans who was returning from a routine lunch-hour walk with his dog, Parker realized there was a more balanced lifestyle to be enjoyed as a rural practitioner.

“Patients are very well cared for in the community.”

— Dr. Gavin Parker

“I had never seen a doctor in blue jeans, and ... I had never seen a doctor who could so easily leave the hospital during a regular work day having only trained in the urban centres,” he recalled. “That impressed me.”

With every rural rotation he participated in during his medical school clerkship, his desire to practice rural medicine grew stronger. Upon graduating medical school, Parker entered the Rural Alberta South family medicine program, which solidified his decision to practice in rural Alberta.

After completing his residency at the University of Calgary, Parker pursued a practice in Pincher Creek. He appreciates the diversity of skills he and his physician, nursing and other medical colleagues are able to use on a daily basis in a rural setting.

He is also happy to open the door to rural opportunities for incoming medical professionals whenever he can. Parker considers himself lucky to have some former pupils as his colleagues.

“I love that medicine is an apprenticeship-based teaching system where someone comes and joins you,” said Parker, noting that staff enfold students into their social lives.

The community cooperativeness is seen in the structure of the Pincher Creek Health Centre, which houses the Associate Clinic in one of its wings.

“I think that’s a real source of strength,” said Parker. “It’s a really good mix. It’s something that lets you keep all your skills sharp. Patients are very well cared for in the community.”

He said he and his wife Jennifer thought hard about where they would locate, as couples do when building careers, and they’re thankful they chose Pincher Creek. They’re now raising three children in a town they’re proud to call home.

“We have a lot of really awesome things near us,” said Parker, noting Waterton Lakes National Park, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, Frank Slide, as well as proximity to the U.S. and bigger centres like Lethbridge and Calgary being just one to two-and-a-half hours drive.

Jennifer teaches elementary students, and the parent-duo coaches about 80 kids in the Barracuda Judo Club from 4-6 p.m. in the upstairs of the same local gym, Monster Fitness, that they frequent in the mornings before work.

Maybe they fit so much into a day because every commute is about five minutes door-to-door, but Parker lets on that it’s because of the giving spirit in the community that he reciprocates.

“We feel blessed to be part of this community and to give back,” said Parker. “I guess at the end of it, if people felt that I gave more than I took, I think I’d be happy with that.”

Article and photograph by Britton Ledingham, RhPAP
Watch the video at youtube.com/AlbertaRhPAP

Brooks to host year's most important event for attraction and retention committees

“Stepping It Up: A Renewed Impact” will be the theme of this year’s RhPAP Community Conference to occur in Brooks on April 10-12, 2018.

A conference keynote speaker will share what the renewal process looks like, with a focus on how this process can strengthen the impact of communities’ attraction and retention work in rural Alberta. Panels members will speak to what renewal has looked like in their rural communities.

Sessions will explore the continuum of health professions in rural Alberta, how best to enhance community attraction and retention within that continuum, as well as the impact of enhanced collaboration and partnership by those supporting health care in rural communities.

A respected leader in community development and engagement will facilitate a workshop focused on strategies to enhance community programs and plans, which will further the learnings on renewal and impact.

A variety of practical tools and techniques will be shared with participants at this two-day conference and workshop combo.

A networking evening with drinks, snacks, and musical entertainment will be held at the Red Roof Studio on April 10.

An evening Gala celebrating the 2017 RhPAP Community Award recipient will also be part of the experience!

To register or for more information, visit rhpap.ca.

Conference Agenda

April 10

7:00 – 10:00 Networking evening: Wine & cheese with local musical entertainment

April 11

7:30 – 8:00 Registration

7:30 - 8:30 Buffet breakfast

8:30 – 9:00 Welcoming remarks

9:00 –10:30 Keynote Address: Stepping It Up to Get 'Er Done (Speaker Brenda Herchmer, Campus for Communities of the Future)

10:30–11:00 Networking & refreshment break

11:00–12:00 Panel Session: Health Professions in Rural Alberta – Understanding the Health Landscape

12:00 – 1:00 Buffet Lunch

1:00 – 2:10 Round Table Discussion: Health Professions in Rural Alberta – On the Ground Experiences

2:10 – 3:20 Panel Session: The Attraction and Retention Continuum

3:20 – 3:35 Networking & refreshment break

3:35 – 4:45 Panel Session: Collaboration and Partnership in Rural Health

4:45 – 5:15 Review: Setting the stage for next day’s workshop & wrap up (Brenda Herchmer)

6:15 – 7:15 Networking event (cash bar)

7:15 –10:30 Banquet and Community Award Ceremony

April 12

7:30 – 8:30 Buffet breakfast

8:30 – 9:00 Opening remarks: Review of yesterday’s sessions & expectations for today

9:00 – 10:15 Workshop: A Get 'Er Done Guide to Transforming Communities (Brenda Herchmer with Grassroots Enterprises)

10:15 - 10:30 Networking & refreshment break

10:30 – 12:15 Workshop: A Get 'Er Done Guide to Transforming Communities, continued

12:15 – 1:15 Buffet Lunch

1:15 – 2:45 Workshop: A Get 'Er Done Guide to Transforming Communities, continued

2:45 – 3:00 Networking & refreshment break

3:00 – 3:30 Review: Next steps & wrap up



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Both in the clinic and in the emergency room, shadowing is a great opportunity to share knowledge, promote the benefits of rural practice, and even learn a little from the students themselves. Many students have come back to the community in clerkship and residency rotations. **It's something we look forward to and I would strongly recommend the shadowing program.** — Dr. Luke Savage, Three Hills, Alberta

Mentors for future rural physicians wanted.

RhPAP's Shadowing Program connects first- and second-year medical students with rural physicians, providing students with the opportunity to observe and learn new skills and to practice simple medical procedures.

For doctors, this program is an excellent way to promote your practice and community to students considering working in rural Alberta. You get to pick the times and dates that work for you and RhPAP will take care of the rest. Doctors will be compensated for their time.

To book a shadowing experience or to get more information on how the program works, contact RhPAP at shadowing@rhpap.ca or at 1-866-423-9911.

About/Alberta Rural Health Quarterly

Alberta Rural Health Quarterly is published four times a year by the Rural Health Professions Action Plan (RhPAP), formerly known as the Rural Physician Action Plan, or "RPAP".

Quarterly is distributed by mail to rural health-care and government stakeholders throughout the province of Alberta.

Issues of the Quarterly are also free to download from the RhPAP website, rhpap.ca/quarterly.

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