



FACES OF FAMILY MEDICINE

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This project would not have been possible without the support, honesty, and willingness of many individuals.

To the family physicians of Newfoundland and Labrador, your tireless efforts do not go unnoticed.

To our specialist colleagues, administrative staff, and other allied health professionals, we thank you for your dedication to primary care in this province.

And finally, to our patients, thank you for being so vulnerable and for sharing your stories. Yours are the faces of family medicine.

-Alicia & Kristen



Family Physician

"I really do appreciate the ability to build long-term relationships with my patients and tap into what I know about them to help tailor their care. I think it's an important part of the continuity of care for patients that I never really got to appreciate it until I started working as a staff. I have had patients in my first year of practice who I've interacted with 20 times either virtually or in person. You do really get to know people both as patients and as human beings and that's a huge privilege.

I have one patient who I hadn't yet met when I got letters from two allied health professionals who were concerned they were depressed. I called the patient in and discussed some of the suggestions one of the allied health professionals made with respect to medications. Within weeks, this person was starting to feel a lot better and I got to see the improvement continue over the following months. I keep looking at this as an example of how the system is supposed to work. We're supposed to work with our allied health professionals in pharmacy and nursing and social work and every different aspect of the system. When it works, it works well and people have good outcomes. This was a hugely rewarding experience in my first year of practice because I got to see this person come out of their shell and become a more well version of themselves. It gave me hope. It was an example of a time when a medication really was life-changing for someone. Being able to see them in follow up and see that they're still doing well was wonderful."



Family Physician

"Really, family medicine is the backbone of medicine. Family physicians are all over the healthcare system: they provide emergency care, they provide palliative care, they provide cancer care, and in my case I provide older adult care and gender diverse care. I'm really glad to show the different faces that family medicine can have within our communities to help people understand that family medicine really is woven throughout our healthcare and woven throughout our communities to support us.

It's amazing how much this job allows you to look at the needs in your community and adapt your practice to meet those needs. I was very privileged to work with an awesome family practice, and when my community showed me that older adult care was something that I really enjoyed and felt that I could contribute to, I transitioned from community-based family medicine into mainly older adult care. We also know that many gender diverse people didn't have access to medical care to help with transition 10 years ago. I knew that it was something that I could provide with the education that I've had, and from there was able to create a system that helped support gender diverse folks living in my area."



Patient

"I'm really thankful to have a family doctor. I have chronic illness that involves frequent follow up. My physician is an absolutely amazing individual who is compassionate, caring and takes the time necessary to adequately listen to the needs of her patients.

A nice thing about my family doctor is that she takes on medical students, residents and nurse practitioner students. I believe this is a very good opportunity for mutual learning. Healthcare is a field that is continually evolving with evidence-based practice. One day a practice might be the norm and the next day it could be a completely different set of parameters regarding medication or diagnostic tests. There's an opportunity for the students to say "Did you know that it's actually so and so now?" and for her to say "Oh my goodness, let's take a look at the literature together," and "Wow I'll definitely incorporate that into my practice." Not only is my doctor mentoring and teaching but she is mutually learning as well. I have a nursing background and I know what it was like being a student and wanting to have opportunities to practice your competencies. I feel good being able to contribute as a patient to student learning."



Family Physician

"For me, family medicine has allowed me to work in a helping profession which I have always wanted to do, while also establishing a healthy work-life balance. It has provided diversity and the ability to tap into different interests depending on the stage of life that I am personally in. I really have been able to reinvent myself throughout my career thus far, in trying to meet the needs of myself, my family and my community. I've been able to have a fulfilling career where I feel like I am giving back to the community, but I've also been able to maintain a family life and parent in a way that feels very well balanced.

Currently, my clinical roles are centered around the care of older adults. I cover the adult inpatient rehab unit and the restorative care unit. It's very much team-based care and it allows me to focus on functional outcomes, on preventative health and on patient care from a holistic perspective. I also have a small practice in a personal care home, where I help patients to find quality of life in the later stage of their lives."



Family Physician

"Well, I've been a family doctor for 13 years. I had to stop and do the math there. And, for me it's more than a job. I really do feel like it's a calling and an immense privilege to do what I do every day. I always wanted to be a family doctor. Even when I was really young and was influenced by own family doctor in Fredericton, New Brunswick. I always had kind of a science-y brain and knew I would do something in that area. So once I got on that path I never really looked back. I don't doubt for a day that it was the right choice for me.

You know, through all the ups and downs we have, at the end of the day it's what I love to do. It's very rewarding. I love getting to know my patients over many years, and I love teaching the students and residents and having them come through and watching them grow."



"In 2019, I was pregnant with my first child. I was scared but also really excited. One of the first things I did was make an appointment to see my family doctor. I was relieved to find out that she handles low risk pregnancies so I could stay with her for prenatal care, labour and delivery, and postnatal care. And she was wonderful. I felt so well cared for. My pregnancy went well, but then one month before I was supposed to deliver, in March 2020, COVID-19 landed and everything changed. All of a sudden it was really scary to leave the house. Because of COVID I lost access to the entire outside world but I didn't lose access to primary care. My family doctor was the only person I could see outside my house; it was total isolation. It was a scary time to be pregnant, but she was a pillar of strength for me.

She was constantly reassuring me that I was going to be okay, my baby was going to be okay, and this would be okay. And it was. In April, I delivered a healthy little girl. But I suffered a fairly traumatic injury during childbirth. When I left the hospital I actually still couldn't walk, I was in a lot of pain, I was having difficulty breastfeeding, I had no mobility and I had no support. The only thing that I had was my family doctor. I needed to see a physiotherapist, I needed to see a chiropractor, I needed to see a lactation consultant, and all those doors were closed. The only care that I had was from my family doctor, and she just took on every role that she needed to fill to give us the best care that we could have asked for. When we'd have our typical weekly checkup, I'm sure she didn't expect to be showing me how to use a walker and carry a baby at the same time, but that's what we did. Every time I left her office she had me feeling like I was the best mom in the world. She provided so much support with breastfeeding, that was really difficult to start. But because of her I did go on to breastfeed for a year. And with her help I made a full recovery from my injury. Now I have a 2-year-old little girl who is just thriving, I am healthy and I am happy, and it's all thanks to family medicine."



Family Physician

"I think it's defined my adult life almost as much as motherhood has. I don't know who I would be if I wasn't, you know, a family doctor in Goose Bay. I wouldn't be the person I am. I think in terms of the positive aspects of the role it's fairly cliché, but it is the relationship with people that you have that is so incredibly unique. Because only you and that person know what's happened in that clinic room year after year after year. And really, only you know what's happened, or at least your perspective of what's happened to that patient over time. So the person who came in freaking out because of their acne when they were in their mid-twenties suddenly has a devastating diagnosis when they're in their mid-forties and seem to roll with the punches and do very well. I mean, how could that happen? So I guess seeing people in very unique, private situations is a privileged position to be in. I don't think very many people other than family doctors have that privileged relationship with people.

And then I think as you get to know any community of people you get back a lot as well. There have been times in my life I can definitely think of, like when I became a mother but also when there was illness in my family, when my patients kind of supported me. And I've gotten great advice from my patients about how to parent adolescents and how to get on the treadmill when I need to, and there is some reciprocity there as well. Maybe they don't even realize that they happen to be speaking to me in a time when it's important for me to hear that."



Family Physician

"There's so many grey zones in family medicine - so many non-algorithmic approaches that you have to take. I think there's a beauty in the artistic side of trying to find the right path for the patient. There's always more than one way to solve a problem. It's trying to use the right side of my brain to find a common pathway of communication with the patient that I find so beautiful and unique to this profession. Since I've been in family medicine I got back into theatre and back into music. I've always been a creative person but I think family medicine has provided an ability to reawaken that creativity."



Patient

“I’ve been a patient of my family doctor for 6 years. I got her when my other doctor was leaving Corner Brook. My Mom was 82 at the time and I asked her if she would also take my Mom. Of course, she agreed to do that. I mean, for me, what I have had with my family doctor is the regular go in, I have an issue or whatever and we clear it up.

But with my Mom it was a different story. My Mom had bad health. She had COPD, was a smoker, and of course at 82 was not willing to give up anything. But the relationship our family doctor formed with my Mom was one that I will never forget. She took her under her wing. She always had a hug for Mom. Mom thought the world of her, even though in the beginning she wasn’t very, I guess, very happy with having a female doctor. Because all throughout Mom’s life she had always had male doctors. But after a while she formed a really good bond. Her health deteriorated to the point where our family doctor had to visit her at home to let her know she was going to start the end-of-life treatment for Mom. Anybody else would have been thrown out of the room, but Mom was very accommodating to our family doctor and listened to her very well.

It was very sad at the time, but she had no hesitation whatsoever of coming over and doing a house call. This day in age with as busy as doctors are, for our family doctor to give up her evening, I tell you, it blew me away. But I knew what I was dealing with when I was dealing with this fine lady. It means a lot for families. Anybody who can do that and take on a family and treat them with the respect that our family doctor has shown to myself and my family deserves a lot of credit. We are healthy today, sitting here, because of her.”



Family Physician

"Sometimes the simplest things in medicine are the most important. When you're camping with young kids sometimes things fall off the radar. Or the most important supplies in your first aid kit have been used up for the cuts and scrapes. What do you do when you find yourself out in the wilderness, hiking, camping, beachcombing or some other exciting adventure for the little humans in your life, and boom everything comes to a complete stop? You hear what sounds like earth shattering screams and think this is going to be bad. When you get close to the situation, you realize this is fixable - I just had to figure out how. Of course, you didn't pack a first aid kit because that wasn't the first thing on your mind when you had to pack extra clothes, food, and water to survive the day.

For our family we have figured out that dandelion leaves are magical. Whenever there is a scrape or a bruise there's an automatic response now by the kids to make a dandelion band-aid to heal the injury. This happened on a whim during a camping trip. There was a big fall and a big knee scrape for a brave three-year-old but no Band-Aids in sight. So, the big sister was sent off to find the best dandelion leaves she could find. She found the biggest, flattest ones and they were perfect. Then she went back on a mission to find long blades of grass. The dandelions went over the injury and the grass was tied around to keep the nature bandage in place. It is now well known that when the Band-Aid falls off, the injury is healed enough to not worry or think about it any further."



Family Physician

“Family medicine gives me an opportunity to care not only for the patient, but also the entire family, and to carry these patients through the cycle of life. You’re able to care for babies, their parents and often their grandparents. You become directly involved in the entire family and can be a positive influence on their health and wellbeing. Whether it’s a small change during an appointment, supporting someone through a serious illness, or providing palliative care, I appreciate being there to provide patients help and direction. I feel that it’s all part of the scope of family medicine; it’s providing all the possible aspects of medical care that we can, and when we can’t, it’s directing patients to people who will provide them with the help that they need.”



Family Physician

“In some ways I feel like family medicine is a vocation as much as an occupation. I came from an extended family with grandparents that lived with us. To be able to take that as a reference in looking after people who are members of a family, sometimes looking after the whole family and the extended family, brings things full circle. My grandparents grew old and died living with us. I saw how they dealt with challenges that presented themselves, and I also saw the beauty of their aging and tapped into the wisdom that they had based on years of living. In retrospect, particularly now when my practice is quite centered on geriatric care, I understand the nuances of getting older and the challenges as well as the joys. It’s a beautiful part of my experience in family medicine.”



Patient, Anonymous

“I think family medicine saved my life. I know that’s a big statement, but I truly believe that. Prior to getting a family doctor where I live currently, I was living in rural Newfoundland and experiencing some very extreme mental health issues. I moved to a bigger community and luckily got a family doctor as well as a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist started the treatment, but then they had to leave the community and I have yet to get another one.

My family doctor took over managing all my mental health concerns and gave me thorough and consistent care. He managed my meds and saw me frequently. He even provided counselling services – I would just go in there and talk and feel so much better when I came out. It was amazing. I can’t even put into words how important that was in my treatment, because without my family doctor, I really don’t know if I would be here today.

I was on disability for several years and since my family doctor took things over and gave me consistent management, I’ve been able to return to work and function in society when I never thought I’d be able to work again.”



Clinic Clerical Staff

“My motto is: I work for and I work with the best. I dearly love my job. I love the family physicians I work with and I love the front desk staff I work with. I’ve been at the clinic for 13 years. I’m the ‘meet and greet’ person. I bring everyone into the rooms, set up the procedures and help the secretaries out front. I feel like I play an important role in my clinic. We’re treated like family, and you also have a level of respect for the people that you work for. We make sure to put the patient first.

I love when you see a person come in through the door and you know that you can help that person. Sometimes the next day you get a follow up call from a patient, or a secretary will call and say, ‘How did you make out today?’ and you get positive feedback. The satisfaction that you have efficiently and as best that you can helped this person in every way possible makes you realize this is an important job.”



Family Physician

“Family medicine has helped me understand people, or perhaps understand that it’s really hard to understand people and to appreciate all of the things that go into making us who we are: all of the pressures and good things and bad things that lead us to make the decisions we make or don’t make.

I remember back when I was a medical student, I was seeing a lady who was having really bad headaches. It turned out that she had headaches because she didn’t have her glasses, and she didn’t have her glasses because her partner had broken them when they had a big fight. I think about that patient a lot actually, because it was such an eye-opening experience. When I see patients now, it always makes me pause when I see something that doesn’t make sense. It’s not just the medicine - it’s the social bits. And it takes a long time to develop those relationships. The lady didn’t tell me about her broken glasses the first time I saw her. It was a couple weeks later when she came back for follow up that she was able to get there. That’s the importance of seeing people over time. It takes time to feel safe to say things.”



OBGYN

“I feel that family medicine is crucial in the role of a specialist. Family physicians have such a broad spectrum of training. They are well trained in continuity of care. This allows me to have a consultant specialist role and they actually provide the care. We’re able to establish continuity for the patient and as the consultant I just get involved for a small step of it.

In my practice itself, I see a lot of family physicians making a positive impact in women’s health. They are doing STI screening, Pap smear clinics, Norplant placements and IUD insertions and we’re really keen to have them continue this because it broadens our specialty role. I even have family physicians assisting me in the OR which has a huge positive impact on my practice because a lot of these patients will have ongoing care with family physicians. I just feel family doctors make my job smoother, and they allow my job to be more concise as a consultant. My career as a specialist can’t exist in the role that it does without family medicine.”



Family Physician

“Family medicine allows you to truly connect with people. You’re not only connecting with your patients, but you’re connecting with their families, your colleagues, the staff you work with and your community.

Being the social butterfly that I am and loving to interact with people, that really is a bonus for me. I say quite frequently, ‘I don’t go to work every day, I hangout with my friends and talk to people, that’s kinda what I do’. You’re not only caring for people and their families, but you get to know them, and they become kind of a ‘pseudofamily’ - you’re looking out for them and there is that bond and that trust. That’s what family medicine really means to me: that connection.”