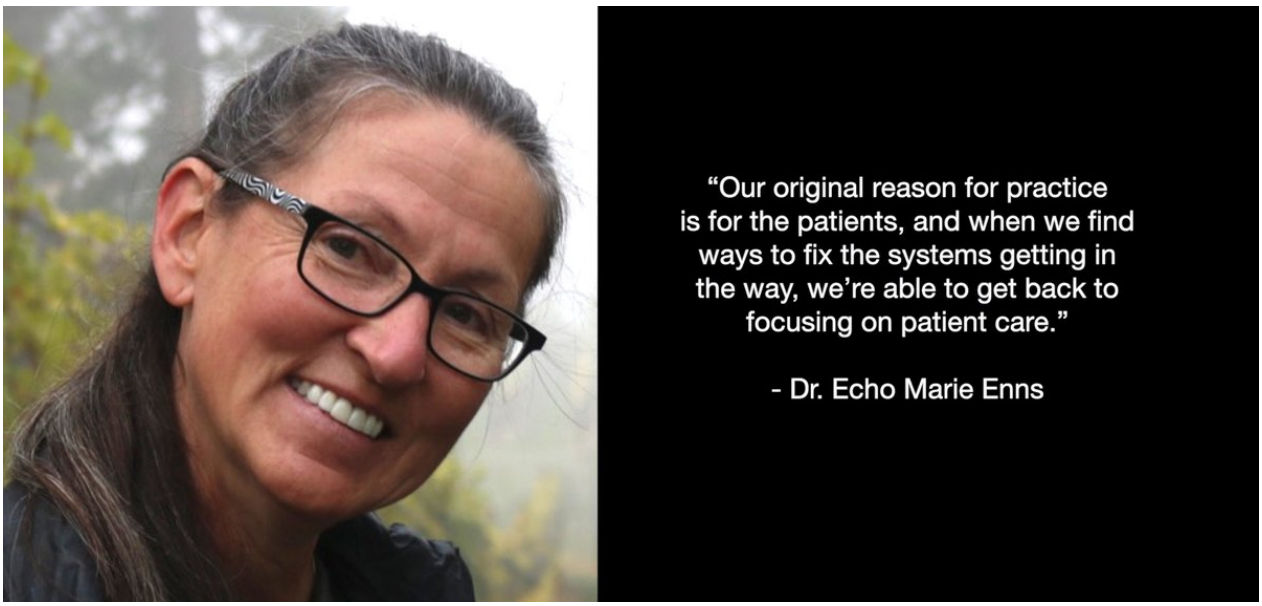
Alberta Doctors' Digest

Shine A Light: Dr. Echo-Marie Enns

Dr. Echo-Marie Enns is a 34-year veteran of medicine whose career has undergone many rewarding evolutions over time. She started as a locum in primary care, then hospital medicine, and progressed into developing a community of practice. She later moved into quality improvement, then information systems improvement. Finally, she circled back into the essentials: patient care as a hospitalist.

Dr. Enns was nominated for Shine A Light for her leadership in health information systems and her consistent advocacy for the physician perspective.

Dr. Enns was nominated by her longtime colleague Nancy Hoeght, with whom she recently collaborated at the intersection of Connect Care and MedRec. Connect Care is a province-wide AHS initiative that unifies clinical information across health care settings to give providers centralized access to patient records and empower patients with better access to their own health data. MedRec is a three-step process that ensures accurate, comprehensive medication information is collected and shared among care providers. Both Connect Care and MedRec exemplify how multidisciplinary teams can work together to improve patient care.



Dr. Echo Marie Enns

Throughout their time working together, Nancy says that Dr. Enns “has always been a passionate advocate for quality health care and best patient outcomes. She has continually advocated for what is right for the patient, even when the opinion might be unpopular. She is a courageous and proactive health and thought leader who is extremely passionate about her work.”

Prior to their work together through Connect Care and MedRec, Nancy and Dr. Enns worked together when Dr. Enns was a physician lead for the Chief Medical Information Office within AHS. “Dr. Enns has always brought forward the physician voice and perspectives in a calm and thoughtful manner. She is wonderful to work with, has a wealth of knowledge and understanding, clinically and in the field of clinical informatics. We can always go to her when we need advice or support, and we are all extremely grateful for that.”

Beyond her leadership in Connect Care and MedRec, Dr. Enns’s career reflects a deep commitment to innovation and collaboration.

An interest in acuity: Patients and system categorization

During the early years of her career doing primary care locums, Dr. Enns worked in various environments, noting that some, for example in urban centres of Vancouver, Victoria and Kelowna, were well-supported with access to hospital, tertiary care with everything needed to get specialist referrals. Others were remote and less supported such as Powell River, Vernon, Yellowknife, Inuvik and Baffin Island. Dr. Enns also briefly worked on cruise ships, which too were isolated medical environments like her remote locums but with a significantly different economic environment as these patients were typically wealthy.

After eight years as an exploring primary care practitioner, Dr. Enns settled into Calgary as a hospitalist. It was her interest in internal medicine and acuity – both patients and the health system – that brought her to hospital medicine.

Community of practice for hospital medicine

The next phase of Dr. Enns’s career was driven by structuring support for her specialty, so she developed a community of practice. Dr. Enns was one of the founders of the Canadian Society of Hospital Medicine (CSHM).

The CSHM was founded in 2001 as the Canadian chapter of the US based Society of Hospital Medicine. Dr. Enns remembers, “I called my colleagues across the country who had hospital programs, and then we banded together and cold-called the CEO of the US National Society of Inpatient Medicine, [now called the Society of Hospital Medicine]. The CEO was quite excited about the society branching out to go international, so he brought the idea to his Board of Directors, and they agreed we should become the Canadian chapter. We formed and have been meeting, connecting and leading projects ever since. The most beneficial project has been continuing medical education for hospitalists because it is a significant need for family doctors, to be supported by real general internal medicine specialists.”

Upskilling and quality improvement

“Education was the first step of bringing along hospital medicine and next was recognizing that quality improvement was the upskilling tool that we needed,” says Dr. Enns.

Quality improvement projects are typically collaborative efforts that focus on enhancing the overall patient experience by improving outcomes, streamlining processes and increasing provider satisfaction.

Part of Dr. Enns's quality improvement work was improving clarity of the hospitalist role on the health care team. "Hospitalists practice in-hospital with others from the multidisciplinary care team. Your quality of care given to patients improves when you know your role in the system, and you are empowered to contribute to standardization and find and decrease inefficiencies. When you are empowered to improve the quality of your work, you enjoy it more, working with multidisciplinary colleagues lines up and ultimately, your patient receives better care."

Quality improvement to reduce frustrations for the whole team

"No one wants to be frustrated everyday," says Dr. Enns. "Most often we (physicians, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists) have common ground in our frustrations, and instead of taking it out on each other, we think, 'How can we make the system better so that we can all work together?' Our original reason for practice is for the patients, and when we find ways to fix the systems getting in the way, we're able to get back to focusing on patient care."

Health information systems improvement: The ultimate quality improvement tool

The next evolution for Dr. Enns was moving into improving the health care system through technology, namely Connect Care. "It's one of the best jobs in Alberta," says Dr. Enns. "After the vendor was chosen, I was one of the lucky few that landed a physician design lead role on the project. I specifically worked in the domain of acute care. Connect Care is the ultimate quality improvement tool."

Back to patient care

After seven and half years, in December 2024, Dr. Enns completed her Connect Care contract and is now coming full-circle. "I'm going to have my final years of practice be devoted to my original reason for being in this career: patient care. Patient care is the thing we are all so proud of and so privileged to be able to do, and we can do it better when we have a good system."

Dr. Echo-Marie Enns's career is a testament to the power of curiosity, collaboration and unwavering dedication to patient care. From remote communities to system-wide innovation, she has consistently sought out ways to improve health care, not just for her patients but for the teams and systems that support them. Her journey reminds us that meaningful change often begins with asking how things can be better and having the courage to lead that change.

As she returns to her roots in patient care, Dr. Enns leaves behind a legacy of leadership, mentorship and a health care system made stronger by her vision.

About the *Shine A Light* Program

The AMA's *Shine A Light* Program allows individual patients or community members to recognize AMA member physicians for:

- Providing exemplary care that made a difference in a patient's life.
- Spearheading projects that improve patient and/or community life.

- Contributing to a high-performing health care system.

Do you know a physician who goes above and beyond to care for their patients? You can nominate them for the *Shine A Light* program on the AMA website.