

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Shine A Light: Dr. Michelle Bischoff

When a patient receives care that brings steadiness, clarity or hope during a difficult moment, the Alberta Medical Association's Shine A Light Program gives them a way to recognize the physician who made that difference.

In her nomination for Dr. Michelle Bischoff, Shirley shared how much that support meant during the frightening early months of her son's life. She described a pediatrician who offered compassion, advocacy, thoughtful preparation and a steady, reassuring presence during a period marked by complex medical concerns and a hospitalization when Shirley's little boy was only four months old.

"She was my rock through the whole process," Shirley wrote. "She truly pulled us out of the depths of despair and gave us hope."

For Dr. Bischoff, reading the nomination was both unexpected and uplifting.

"It was incredibly meaningful to read," she said. "To know a family felt supported during such a difficult time is something I don't take for granted."

Years in practice

Dr. Bischoff completed medical school at the University of Alberta in 2013, followed by a pediatrics residency there in 2017. She has been practising as a pediatrician since then. Originally from Edmonton, she now lives and works in Calgary.



Dr. Michelle Bischoff

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Why pediatrics

For Dr. Bischoff, pediatrics offers a combination of complexity, breadth and long-term connection that she finds deeply fulfilling.

“I see children from birth to age 18 with a wide variety of health conditions,” she said. “In some cases I follow them longitudinally and develop long-term relationships with them and their families, which is really special and rewarding.”

Children’s resiliency is another part of what keeps her inspired.

“Children have an incredible capacity to recover and maintain a positive attitude, despite sometimes the most difficult circumstances,” she said. “They can’t necessarily tell you in words what they need or what’s going on, and that’s the challenge and clinical intuition needed in pediatrics that makes this work so meaningful.”

Working with kids and their families

Dr. Bischoff approaches patient care as both a clinician and a communicator. The medical work is essential – reviewing specialist notes, piecing together complex histories and helping families navigate the system – but the relational aspect is just as important.

“What I find most rewarding is not only the problem-solving and advocacy, being that voice for a child in medical management, but also helping patients and families feel understood and supported, and ensuring they know someone truly cares,” she said. “I think no matter what we do as physicians, even if we provide a great evidence-based management plan, if patients don’t feel truly listened to and cared for, then it may not be a meaningful interaction.”

Shirley’s experience reflected this approach: Dr. Bischoff preparing thoroughly before each visit, taking time to explain next steps, responding respectfully to concerns, helping expedite a specialist appointment when the waitlist was long and offering support in exploring second opinions when needed.

Staying grounded through difficult cases

Pediatrics comes with emotionally heavy moments, particularly when working with very young or medically complex children. For Dr. Bischoff, two things help her stay grounded: the resiliency of her patients and the perspective she brings as a parent.

“Despite their medical circumstances, children’s happiness and resiliency are uplifting,” she said. “Also, being a parent myself has given me a new viewpoint, including a deeper understanding and empathy for what families are going through.”

Finding balance outside of medicine plays a role too, even if it’s an ongoing challenge.

“Taking time for myself and my family is always a challenge as a woman in medicine,” she said. “But I love my job, it’s a joy and privilege to care for families like Shirley’s.”

Hearing the impact

When asked how it felt to read Shirley's message, Dr. Bischoff answered thoughtfully.

"I'm very glad to hear she had that experience," she said. "I try to treat every patient with the same outlook and respect and try to put myself in their position. I do my best to care for the patient medically but also try to understand their experience and make them feel heard and truly supported."

Hearing that her care made such a difference is something she carries with gratitude.

"It was an honour to read Shirley's nomination," she said. "Messages like that stay with you. Knowing I made a meaningful difference for a family is the reason I do this work."

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 the following:

- 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.