

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Shine A Light: Dr. Vivian Cheng

When a patient receives care that helps them feel heard, respected and supported, 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. Vivian Cheng, Miranda described a family physician whose approach is marked by attentiveness, respect and genuine concern.

"She has always listened to me and taken my concerns seriously, and shows the utmost care," Miranda wrote. "It's obvious she cares for her patients and isn't just in the profession for the paycheck."

For Dr. Cheng, reading those words was meaningful.

"It meant a lot to see that a patient took the time to nominate me," she says. "I appreciate all the kind words I receive. After almost a decade in practice now, it really reaffirms for me that I wouldn't want to do anything else."



Dr. Vivian Cheng

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- Dr. Vivian Cheng

Years in practice

Dr. Cheng graduated from residency in 2017 and now works as a family physician in Calgary. She practices four days a week at a community clinic, where she cares for about 1,400 patients. In addition to her clinic work, she also dedicates time to the

Calgary Foothills Primary Care Network's Access 365 after-hours clinic, supporting patients with semi-urgent needs who aren't able to see their primary care provider.

Why family medicine?

Dr. Cheng's path to medicine began with a background in science and research. While she appreciated the analytical side of that work, she found herself wanting more direct connection with people.

"I didn't love the fact that I wasn't working with people. It was a lot of work with numbers and data, and I wanted to work with people. I wanted a direct hands-on approach where I could get to know people, build relationships with them and help them along the way when they needed it."

Those relationships are what ultimately drew her to family medicine.

During her rotations in British Columbia, it was her time in rural settings that gave her a close look at caring for patients from their first breath to their last, and the long-term bonds family physicians can build with patients.

"I really enjoyed my rural rotations. They gave me a real appreciation for the connections and relationships my mentors built with their patients, how they got to know them as people and not just a number on a spreadsheet. Those experiences taught me that the work is hard, but really rewarding when you can connect with someone in their time of need and be there for them."

Building long-term relationships

In her current practice, most of Dr. Cheng's patients have been with her for a long time. She is not currently taking new patients, except for newborns, and her clinic has a low turnover rate.

That continuity is one of the parts of family medicine she values most.

"I really can't imagine not doing family medicine. Yes, there are challenges, and we're seeing more and more complex patient needs, but it is a privilege to be a part of some of the most personal and vulnerable moments in patients' lives – to listen, to care for them and to be there for them."

Miranda's nomination reflects that same emphasis on relationship-centred care: a physician who listens carefully, takes concerns seriously and makes patients feel that their health and well being matter.

Supporting patients through complex moments

While she enjoys caring for all patients, Dr. Cheng is candid about having a soft spot for those facing a mental health concern.

Though the work can be emotionally difficult, it is also deeply meaningful.

"I have a lot of compassion for our mental health patient population. I feel very privileged to be able to help someone through what might be the darkest time of their life, and I don't take that privilege lightly. It is in those moments that care is about human

connection. I look at it like this: if I can't get a patient better, for whatever reason, then I can listen. I can make sure they have someone who listens and who cares."

That belief is central to her approach: care is not only about diagnosis and treatment, but also about connection, trust and making sure patients know their concerns are not being dismissed.

Family medicine, Dr. Cheng says, comes with both highs and lows. But despite the challenges, she wouldn't have chosen a different path.

"I'm very blessed to be in this career. Family doctors play a special role – a foundational role – for patients and the health care system, and we all need family doctors."

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.

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