

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Why Dr. Melanie Lewis gets our physician wellness #GOAT

When we caught up with Dr. Melanie Lewis, she was working in her role as Associate Dean of Learner Advocacy & Wellness in the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry (FoMD) at the University of Alberta. This office is charged with supporting the undergraduate, postgraduate (residents/fellows) and graduate students in the FoMD.

What are some of your professional roles?

1. Associate Dean, Learner Advocacy & Wellness
2. Professor of Pediatrics
3. Medical Director, Edmonton Down Syndrome Clinic
4. General Pediatrician, Stollery Children's Hospital
5. Co-Chair, AFMC Student Affairs Committee



Dr. Melanie Lewis is focusing on personal, curricular and institutional health.

For you, what three thoughts describe the current state of physician wellness in Alberta?

1. Medical learners and practicing physicians battling to acquire optimal work-life integration.
2. Medical learners and practicing physicians struggling against medical culture and systems that do not support wellness and resilience.
3. Stigma still persists around mental health and continues to be a significant barrier for learners and physicians from reaching out for help.

What three thoughts describe your goals related to physician wellness in Alberta?

1. Improve the health of learners and physicians across the professional continuum.
2. Optimize our culture and systems to promote a healthy work environment.
3. Remove barriers that prevent learners and physicians from seeking help and support.

Tell us about something you are currently working on.

Re-conceptualizing learner health into three categories: personal health, curricular health (composition and flexibility of our jam-packed medical curriculum), and institutional health (mistreatment, collegiality, medical culture and systems).

As a physician yourself, what is something you do intentionally to take care of your mental health?

Look after my personal health (sleep, exercise, diet), ensure time with my family, work in an environment that is nourishing and not eroding to my resilience.

What is your cue that an area of your own wellness needs your attention?

When my optimism is low and my irritability with simply day-to-day issues is high.

What area of your wellness do you find the most challenging to look after?

Ensuring work doesn't creep into my family and personal time. We can't always put our patients first.

How is that different now than it was earlier in your career?

As I have progressed in my career, my roles have become more complex: Associate Dean, pediatrician, mom, wife; it all becomes more complicated to balance and still feel you are doing a reasonable job in all roles. My expectations have changed, I recognize that some days I'm just "good enough" and that's OK.

Choose one of your roles above, and tell us what your colleagues can expect from you in that role.

Associate Dean: To be available, to be optimistic, to be innovative, to appreciate my colleagues and the strengths they bring to the office and to our learners.

If you had the magic wand for physician wellness what would you do?

1. To have more flexibility in our day-to-day lives.
2. Allow more time for ourselves and our families.
3. The ability to take a breath when we really need it.

What one thing do you want your colleagues to know?

How much I have learned from both my learners and my colleagues and how grateful I am to be a part of this profession.

And now, for fun, tell us your preference in each of the following pairs:

sweet or salty: *salty*

rural or urban: *rural*

coffee or energy drink: *coffee*

introvert or extrovert: *extrovert*

yoga or Zumba: *Zumba*

drums or piano: *piano*

summer or winter: *summer*

journal or meditate: *journal*