

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Shine A Light: Dr. Lori Lobay

Physician sees many changes in rural medicine

Born and raised in small town Alberta, Dr. Lori Lobay is a rural general practitioner and has been, for 35 years.

Born in Smoky Lake and delivered by her father (because the doctor from Vilna did not make it in time), Lori always planned to work rurally. Lori's father, Dr. Fred Lobay, was Smoky Lake's lone physician for several decades, during which he cared for the residents of Smoky Lake and also the nearby Indigenous Cree population and Hutterite communities.

As a small-town doctor in rural Alberta, travelling country roads at all hours during snowstorms was a matter of course for Dr. Fred Lobay. Often with family in tow, he delivered babies and administered anesthetics for the town and neighboring communities. Dr. Lobay passed on his love and dedication as a country doctor to his daughter, Lori.

In a memoriam article (*Edmonton Journal*, September 14, 2013; written by Keith Gerein) dedicated to her father upon his death August 25, at age 89, Lori commented: "He was a hard-working, uncomplaining, humble sort of fella who really loved his job and the community."



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It is evident, based on the description provided by Dr. Alison Clarke in her nomination of Lori for recognition by the AMA's Shine A Light program, that Lori only planned to do what she knew, providing care with compassion while dedicating herself to her patients and community.

"Dr. Lobay embodies the qualities that define a great family physician," says Dr. Clarke. "Her dedication, energy and compassion ensure her patients receive optimal care. Her commitment to her practice is exemplary."

Lori graduated from the University of Alberta's Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry in 1982. She did a rotating internship at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton with plans to enter rural medicine. She did locums and settled in Strathmore, marrying cowboy, farmer agrolgist and Mr. Mom, Don Anderson.

Lori reflects on 35 years of rural family medicine in Strathmore, and the many changes she has seen. "It was an adventure; challenging and fascinating," she says. As the first Chief of Staff of Strathmore's Valley General Hospital, Lori notes: "We were required to face uncertainty and deal with everything that presented. We worked as a team: the first responders, paramedics, nurses, radiology, laboratory, home care, RCMP and mortician. Everyone knew everyone."

Located on the Trans Canada highway, Valley General Hospital's emergency rooms were some of the busiest in Alberta. As a rural physician in the 80s and 90s, adaptability was the name of the game. "We did family medicine, but also pediatrics, emergency medicine, orthopedics, psychiatry, obstetrics (both low- and high-risk), gynecology, palliative medicine and geriatrics."

Like her father, Lori still works with the Blackfoot Indigenous peoples of Siksika and many Hutterite colonies.

During her 30-plus years as a rural doctor, Lori has noticed changes: "Now, everything is specialized, with physicians restricting what they want to do." It isn't only the practice of medicine that has changed, though. Lori notes that when she does shifts in Valley Medical Clinic's community walk-in, the patient asks who she is and how long she has been there. "Strathmore is no longer a small town and no longer rural," Lori somewhat wistfully comments.

Just as Lori has played a vital, caring role in so many Strathmore patients' lives, life and work in Strathmore has been good to her. She and her husband Don have raised three children in Strathmore, who have gone on to make their marks on the world: Lori's daughter, Blaire, is currently a transplant fellow (2012 University of Alberta Faculty of Medicine; general surgery residency, 2017, also U of A), having thoroughly enjoyed the year she spent in Grande Prairie; son Zane is a teacher; and son Dale is an optometrist. Lori and Don have three grandsons: Rhett, Bobby and Hank. Being "Baba" to her grandchildren is yet another exciting relationship for this busy family physician who is still very dedicated to her patients and community.

Even amidst all the changes in rural medicine in Alberta, there still exists an element of 'small world,' as Lori realized when she discovered that Blaire was attending medical school with the grandson of one of her father's former colleagues; in fact, the very doctor who hadn't been able to make it to Lori's birth! "That was very special," says Lori.

Introducing ... Dr. Lori Lobay

Years in practice

35

Why medicine?

"My patients are the favorite part of my work. I value the many, wonderful relationships I've built over the years, caring for patients and their families. I rejoice in their accomplishments and I feel sad when they cry."

Mantra/philosophy of life

To the young resident physicians and medical students beginning their careers, Lori offers the same advice she has given to her own children: "Don't expect anybody to give you anything. If you want something, go get it. And if you don't get it, work harder. Persevere."

About Shine A Light

Initiated by Dr. Alison Clarke during her 2018-19 term as President, AMA's [Shine A Light](#) program recognizes and celebrates the special physicians of Alberta who, in their "everyday" practices, demonstrate an unwavering commitment to caring for their patients; to ensuring that their patients receive top quality, coordinated care; to seeking patient-centred ways to improve the delivery of health care in Alberta; and to always seeing the people in their patients.

Nominate a Colleague

Do you know a physician who the AMA should 'Shine A Light' on? If so, please submit a [nomination form](#).