

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Dr. Robert Chan gets our Physician Wellness #GOAT

When we caught up with Dr. Robert Chan, he was working on The Division of Orthopaedic Surgery, University of Alberta's annual January retreat that has been occurring for the past 15 years. Dr. Chan shared that he feels very fortunate to be in a division where all members, surgeons and residents are valued. The annual retreat has traditionally been about sharing orthopedic knowledge, as well as building relationships and camaraderie.

This past year, it was decided to take a different approach and focus on physician wellness. Along with the efforts of Dr. Sukhdeep Dulai and Dr. Edward Masson, the team put together an agenda believed to help all who attended, develop strategies to manage the tremendous stresses in their lives. Based on the thoughtful and honest feedback by the divisional members after last January's retreat, this upcoming 16th should be even more enjoyable for all!



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What are your professional roles?

- RCPSC - Orthopedic Surgery
- Orthopedic Surgeon, Sturgeon Community Hospital, St. Albert, AB
- Clinical Assistant Professor, Department of Surgery, University of Alberta
- Orthopedic Surgery Residency Program Director, U of A

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

- Challenging
- Improving
- Hopeful

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

- Awareness
- Attention
- Action

Tell us about something you are currently working on.

Currently, I am working on restructuring the orthopedic residency program. A successful residency program is more than just meeting the accreditation standards of our College. It is about placing value on the input from our trainees and the teaching staff.

It was mainly based on resident feedback that we made very significant changes to our five-year rotational schedule that was just implemented on July 1, 2019. The changes responded to two main challenges for our training program:

- Resident feedback regarding some PGY5 rotations being heavily service-biased.
- The Royal College implementation of Competence By Design (CBD) curriculum for orthopedic surgery to commence July 1.

Our notable changes involved replacing those heavily service-biased rotations with more educationally balanced ones that, in the end, will hopefully help us address both challenges.

Arguably, this might have negatively impacted the work balance of our teaching staff, but I will closely monitor the effects of these changes. This will certainly not be the end of our ever-evolving residency program!

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

I exercise regularly.

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

When I am thinking about work and not much else.

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

Spending quality time with my family.

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

It's harder now because everyone's schedule is busier, but now also more enjoyable when we do spend time together.

What one thing do you want your colleagues to know?

It's okay to work less.

With respect to physician wellness, what gets your #GOAT? and why?

PARA contract gets my #GOAT!

It is not just being a residency program director that has me interested in resident wellbeing, but I think this is where physician wellbeing all starts.

Being a surgical resident in the early 2000s, it was a transitional time where surgeons were starting to become more accepting of residents being absent post-call. It is because of resident unions such as PARA; our work culture has changed for the better. It is actually OK to feel tired after working over 24 hours straight.

As practicing physicians, I think we can still refer to the PARA guidelines for how to not overload the work aspect of our lives.

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

Dog or Cat - Dog

Rural or Urban - Urban

Sweet or Salty - Salty

Introvert or Extrovert - Extrovert

Yoga or Zumba - Yoga

Text or Call - Call

Summer or Winter - Summer

Journal or Meditate - Meditate

Sing or Dance – Sing