

# Alberta Doctors' Digest

## Shine A Light: Dr. Remo Panaccione

Technology, science and research ... But above all, the patient

Described as “a true patient advocate” and “a very thoughtful and conscientious physician,” Dr. Remo Panaccione credits what he has learned from his patients through the years for helping him be a better doctor.

A wearer of many lab coats, Dr. Panaccione is a gastroenterologist at the Foothills Medical Centre; a professor of medicine at the University of Calgary; Director of the [U of C's Inflammatory Bowel Disease Clinic](#); Director of GI Research; and Director of [Admissions, Cumming School of Medicine](#).

“I think telemedicine is the future,” says Dr. Panaccione, adding, “Our nurses do quite a bit of telemedicine through the IBD clinic. We are also working with five other IBD clinics across the country on a large study (funded by Crohn's Colitis Canada) of the application of telemedicine to the IBD patient population,” he continues.

Nominated for recognition by the AMA's [Shine A Light program](#) by colleague Dr. Rabiya Jalil (family physician and Medical Director, AIMG Program; and Associate Director of Admissions, Cumming School of Medicine), Dr. Panaccione discovered his interests in gastroenterology from an early mentor, and his desire to delve into further research into IBD with a subsequent mentor.



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Dedicated to the management of the IBD (Crohn's Disease and ulcerative colitis) patient population, Dr. Panaccione says, "Whenever you're dealing with someone with a chronic illness, you become not only their specialist, but their primary care provider and their confidante." Treating patients with chronic illness requires both a health care and personal commitment, one Dr. Panaccione has embraced. "I've seen patients from their early teens through many of life's milestones."

Describing Dr. Panaccione's conscientiousness, Dr. Jalil comments, "He is always available to his patients, even emailing with them to ensure care between appointments and to answer questions."

A proponent of technology and virtual care, Dr. Panaccione makes himself accessible to patients during and after office hours. "I travel extensively, but I want patients to have a direct link to me. I'm an advocate of electronic connections with patients."

#### **Fending off an epidemic: clinical trials and research**

Dr. Panaccione's drive to help the province's and the country's IBD patient populations fuels his work in the implementation and performance of clinical trials of new therapies in IBD, as well as his research in identifying targets to develop new therapies. (The U of C's IBD Clinical Trials Unit ranks among the top five units in the world.)

An increase in IBD in newly industrialized countries around the world motivates Dr. Panaccione and his team to continue on this research path. "Possibly it's the environment," he says, when asked what might be causing this increase.

"Our group, particularly Dr. Gil Kaplan, is studying this intensely," Dr. Panaccione explains. "We have 10 physicians dedicated to studying IBD. One area that we are looking at is the epidemiology of the disease. We know this is going to become a global epidemic, and it's important that we continue to educate our colleagues around the world, so we can understand the disease and explore new therapeutic options."

#### **Up against the Alberta government's biosimilar policy**

Last November, Dr. Panaccione met with health minister Tyler Shandro to urge him not to switch from the current provincial coverage of a biologics group of treatment drugs for patients with IBD to coverage of a cheaper, alternative medication (biosimilars).

"Through social and traditional media, I've tried to educate and advocate against the Alberta government's biosimilar policy," says Dr. Panaccione. "It may have gone ahead, but we're committed to continuing to study it: how this policy impacts patients not only physically, but emotionally and psychologically. We want to inform the province, the country and the rest of world about the impact of such a policy."

#### **Cummings School of Medicine: Open door policy**

It's evident that Dr. Panaccione and his admissions staff are equally dedicated to the welfare of another community: the U of C's incoming medical students. In his role as director of admissions with the Cumming School of Medicine (2,550 students and 511

full-time faculty), Dr. Panaccione carries on the school's mandate – established by Dr. Ian Walker, former director of admissions – of diversity, equity and social accountability.

“We're proud of our efforts to constantly look at ways to increase diversity within the admissions process,” explains Dr. Panaccione. “We're always open to opportunities to make the admissions process easier, better and more inclusive. There should be equal opportunity to pursue a career in medicine.”

The Cumming School of Medicine's mission and vision of social accountability is exemplified by the student-run clinic for Calgary's under-served populations.

## Introducing ... Dr. Remo Panaccione

### Years in practice

21

### Why medicine?

There is no better privilege than to be able to serve your fellow human. There are not many jobs or careers you can have where you can go to bed at night and say, “Today I did the right thing.”

### Mantra/philosophy of life

Be thankful for those who help to get you there ... wherever “there” may be.

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## 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-centered 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](#).