

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Dr. Erica Dance gets our Physician Wellness #GOAT!

When we caught up with Dr. Dance, we asked her to describe some of the projects she is currently working on. Here is what she shared with us.

In the early days of the pandemic, as we started to imagine what responding to COVID-19 would be like and how it could affect our own health and wellbeing, my emergency medicine colleagues at the Royal Alexandra Hospital and Northeast Community Health Centre looked to find ways to support each other. I am proud to have been able to work with an amazing group of colleagues to quickly and efficiently establish a robust and capable peer support program. I am now collaborating with Well Doc Alberta and the physician leads in the Edmonton Zone for Emergency Medicine to expand this program beyond our site with the hopes of supporting the entire zone and beyond.

I am also very proud of the work I have been doing to advocate for pregnant and breastfeeding resident physicians in Alberta. Nearly two years of work including research, education, liaising and meetings has resulted in the identification or creation of appropriate lactation spaces at the four largest teaching hospitals in Edmonton. There is still much work to do in order for breastfeeding to be fully supported and free of barriers for resident physicians, but these first steps have moved us in the right direction. I am now working with an incredible group of physicians and trainees undertaking a scoping review looking at the fertility and pregnancy risks associated with being a resident physician.

What are your professional roles?

- Emergency physician, Royal Alexandra Hospital and Northeast Community Health Centre
- Clinical professor, Department of Emergency Medicine, Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry
- Assistant dean, Resident & Fellow Affairs, Office of Advocacy & Wellbeing, Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry
- Physician collaborator and recent physician associate, Well Doc Alberta
- Physician Wellness Taskforce member, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada
- Hearing Tribunal and Complaint Review Committee member, College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta



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Please, briefly describe your roles with the following.

The University of Alberta, Office of Advocacy & Wellbeing, Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry

My role in the OAW is to support resident physicians and fellows in order to ensure they are able to reach their full personal and academic potential. My office is a confidential, safe and inclusive space, which minimizes or avoids conflicts of interest and potential for bias. The majority of my work is focused on one-on-one learner case management where I assist and advocate for trainees facing issues affecting their health, academics or their personal lives. I also provide support to programs and offer educational sessions on a variety of issues including physician health, boundaries, professionalism and patient concerns.

The Resident Wellness Conference

The RWC is a biennial half-day conference offering interactive, fun and interesting sessions on a variety of important topics relevant to the health and wellbeing of resident physicians. This conference has been a successful and well received culmination of the hard work spearheaded by the Alberta Medical Association’s Physician and Family Support Program and supported by the Office of Advocacy & Wellbeing and the Professional Association of Resident Physicians of Alberta.

Well Doc Alberta

As described on their website, Well Doc Alberta “is an initiative aimed at advancing a collaborative, cooperative, pan-provincial approach to physician wellness.” I was fortunate to be one of the inaugural physician associates with Well Doc Alberta and am proud to have contributed to the development of this new initiative. Since July 2020, I moved into a physician collaborator role where I hope to continue sharing information and support on topics relating to physician health especially for resident physicians, peer support and patient concerns.

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

In the OAW, resident physician colleagues can expect me to provide a safe, inclusive space where they can feel comfortable discussing any concern they may have. Further, they can expect me to listen with an open mind and to help develop a plan to support their success. To assist with these goals, they can expect that I will have positive relationships within the university as well as with collaborating organizations including the Physician and Family Support Program, Alberta Health Services and the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta. Finally, they can expect that I will strive to maintain a solid understanding of the processes which affect their training so that together we can find answers and solutions to the issues they are facing.

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

- challenged
- essential
- relevant

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

- advocacy
- empathy
- evidence-based

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

I keep a strong personal support network at home, with my clinical and administrative colleagues, and with my friends and family. I express gratitude as often as possible; I choose my battles wisely (both professionally and personally); and I ensure I have safe people and spaces to vent my emotions.

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

When I find myself losing sleep over interactions which would normally not bother me.

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

Putting down the devices and turning off work without feeling guilty about it.

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

Both personally and professionally, I have more responsibilities now than I did earlier in my career. When coupled with the increased prevalence of social media and the ease of electronic communication, this results in an increased expectation of availability and rapid response as compared to when I was first in practice.

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

I would have a greater influence on the systemic issues which have the largest impact on physician health.

What one thing do you want your colleagues to know?

That they are not alone and that there is always somewhere or someone they can safely reach out to for compassionate support.

With respect to physician wellness, what is your Greatest of All Time (#GOAT) and why?

There is no question that my #GOAT is the AMA's Physician and Family Support Program. The PFSP offers confidential, compassionate and expert advice and support to all physicians and trainees in Alberta any time of any day without exception. I cannot imagine doing what I do without the support of the PFSP.

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 - both

Introvert or extrovert - I am an introvert at heart with an extroverted exterior

Yoga or zumba - yoga

Text or call - text (and for sure text before you call if you must call)

Summer or winter - winter

Journal or meditate - meditate

Sing or dance - despite my name, I prefer to sing (albeit terribly)

Contact

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