

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Shine A Light

We knew we had amazing doctors ... your patients think so too!

Eleven patients nominated their family physicians from June 30 to August 4 – and one physician nominated a colleague – for recognition by the AMA's [Shine A Light](#) program.

This large number of nominations over a period of two months has necessitated a change in our usual Shine A Light format, which has been to individually profile nominated physicians. However, to promptly share the news of this summer's many thoughtful and heartfelt SAL nominations – and because we could all really use some positive, uplifting news – we've elected to write one article about all 10 of these outstanding physicians (one physician was nominated twice) and why their patients (and colleague) wanted these doctors recognized and thanked for their endlessly unselfish service.

The following family physicians were nominated for recognition by Shine A Light:

Dr. Sanjeev Bhatla - Calgary

Dr. Michelle Dion - Sherwood Park

Dr. Heidi Fell - Calgary

Dr. Tulika Karan - Calgary

Dr. Lai Man Ma - Edmonton

Dr. Peter Mah - Red Deer

Dr. Patricia Pawaroo - Calgary

Dr. Andrea Scott - Edmonton

Dr. Nasreen Sheik - Calgary

Dr. Wikus Venter - Calgary (nominated twice)



(L to R): Dr. Sanjeev Bhatla, Dr. Michelle Dion, Dr. Heidi Fell, Dr. Tulika Karan, Dr. Peter Mah, Dr. Patricia Pawaroo, Dr. Andrea Scott. (Not pictured): Dr. Lai Man Ma, Dr. Nasreen Sheik, Dr. Wikus Venter.

Common themes

While these 10 physicians were nominated for varying reasons, the nominations revealed common themes. For instance, several patients with complex health issues and under the care of multiple doctors and/or specialists described their physicians as providing outstanding coordinated care.

Patients described how they were amazed and touched by their doctor's ability to stay informed of their various health conditions and appointments with other care providers and how their doctors never make them feel rushed in appointments, always allowing and taking the necessary time during check-ups to ask questions about all matters of health – and even family!

When describing their gratitude for their physician's time, attention and care, patients made the following comments.

Re: Coordinated care of complex patients

- “As someone with myriad medical problems, it is difficult to find a doctor to trust and be fully open with,” said Melissa. “Dr. Scott is exceptional in this way, validating concerns I was reticent to discuss ... She connected me with a team of the best specialists in Edmonton. It is not easy to have someone like me as a patient and Dr. Scott was never deterred. I want to emphasize how much that reflects on her as a practitioner, setting her apart from the rest. She takes the gold.”
- “Dr. Venter is a compassionate, conscientious professional,” said Caroline. “He listens intently and carefully to his patients. He's able to discern medical issues. Because of his thorough medical expertise, he directed me to a cardiologist who was able to replace the missing valve in my heart. The after-surgery care was exceptional! Dr. Venter has supported me throughout numerous medical issues ... He provides excellent care both medically and emotionally (through his kind, supportive manner).”
- “My health care team is large!” said Suzanne. “As my family doctor, Dr. Karan has connected me with excellent care so many times. She remembers what's going on and checks in on everything when I see her, not just whatever I booked the appointment for. I never feel rushed, even though there's a long list of things, and she always considers my concerns and opinions and takes my input seriously ... I sometimes feel sorry for her juggling my care, but she does it with compassion and grace and I can't express how I appreciate her.”

Re: Time, compassion and skill; “above and beyond” care and advocacy

- In her June 30 nomination of her and her husband’s family physician, Dr. Nasreen Sheik, Martha described how her husband – suffering from dementia – was committed to a long-term care facility in March. Martha and her husband faced the double-whammy of the move to a facility at the same time as Martha was banned from visiting her husband due to the pandemic. “It was devastating for both of us,” she says.

Just four days into the separation, Dr. Sheik called Martha to check on her. “She knew how close our relationship was and what I must be going through,” says Martha. “Dr. Sheik kept calling me, giving me courage and hope.” As the time apart dragged on over endless weeks of separation, Martha says she started losing track of time and “undesirable thoughts crossed my mind.”

Around this time, Dr. Sheik stepped in and arranged for Martha’s husband to be returned to his home. “I owe Dr. Sheik my life, plus my husband’s,” says Martha. Caring for her husband again, Martha says, “I can’t thank Dr. Sheik enough for letting the both of us enjoy the remaining days of life together.”

- “In a world that is too often disconnected and impersonal, Dr. Bhatla’s familiar questions about how I and each of my family members are doing at the start of a visit takes one back to a time when a family physician was truly a part of the family,” said Michael. “That is the magic that Dr. Bhatla brings to his practice.”

“I cannot think of a more deserving professional to receive recognition of his willingness to take after-hour calls on his cellphone, his commitment to staying on top of current literature and all of the other things he does to be an exceptional doctor ... It is an absolute privilege to take the time to submit this nomination.”

- Barbara nominated Dr. Peter Mah. “Family doctor extraordinaire!” she said. Barbara’s whole family, including her recently deceased mother, are (were) cared for by Dr. Mah. “35+ years. We are incredibly grateful. Thorough, proficient, kind, over-and-above effort to assist. We all appreciate him very much!”
- In her nomination of her colleague, Dr. Ma, Dr. Margaret Borger said, “Dr. Ma is an outstanding geriatrician and family doctor who truly cares and advocates for her patients. She works selflessly for her patients, peers and students. I’m honored to know her.”
- Dr. Pawaroo is a “very caring and complete doctor,” said Darren. “She is always doing the best for her patients.”
- “Dr. Fell is my family doctor,” said Cynthia. “She is always thoughtful, respectful and takes the time to get to know her patients. I am so grateful for her skill, compassion and knowledge. I don’t know what I’d do without her.”
- In her nomination of her family doctor, Dr. Dion, Alexis said, “I live in Edmonton and have only been seeing Dr. Dion for about a year, after I fired my previous doctor for lackadaisical care. I am very impressed by Dr. Dion’s ability to listen and take my concerns into account.”

Dr. Dion’s patient was impressed by her clinic’s (East Edmonton Health Centre) outreach at the beginning of the pandemic:

“The clinic called to do a survey about patient health during the pandemic. I was asked about my stress levels, about financial stress, about my exercise habits and whether I had people to talk to and connect with. I was very impressed that the clinic took the

opportunity to check on their patients during the pandemic and were making sure that patients were receiving quality care. The associate and I talked about any bloodwork and upcoming procedures I might need and discussed my current health concerns.”

- In the second nomination of Dr. Venter, Lee Anne said that Dr. Venter provides “excellent professional care ... open and honest consultation ... he’s an expert in his field. He’s easy to talk to about any health concerns I may have.”
- Of Dr. Scott, Melissa added, “She always took the extra step, e.g., calling me on her personal time to facilitate treatment while I was out of town. She took great time and care to help me work through anxiety/depression, including many months of weekly CBT sessions while training under a psychiatrist’s supervision. I have heard of no other GP doing so out of an ‘interest in mental health’.”

She continued, “For five years Dr. Scott was instrumental in my medical care through the most trying time of my life. I’ve moved to a different city since and, while I have found good care, it is not exceptional by any means. I hold back ... and speak very little so as not to take up too much time in a bustling, overcrowded clinic. I feel like a burden. Dr. Scott not only took the time to listen, but knew intuitively when I wasn’t sharing the whole story and would pry it out of me. She always knew what to ask. What to say. What to do.”

Albertans love their family physicians

Finally, another theme was consistent throughout this summer’s Shine A Light nominations: patients clearly love their doctors; they consider Alberta’s doctors to be outstanding and unparalleled in their care and treatment of their patients; and they are angered and worried by the government’s treatment of doctors.

“I am so grateful that my mom’s health was such, prior to her passing, that she need not witness the disrespect and smearing of Alberta doctors (and medical professionals, educators in general). It has been painful and shocking to witness the mistreatment by the UCP government.”

“My doctor saved my life! I hope that he will be my family doctor for many years to come. The physician-patient relationship, especially with our family doctors, is crucial to the foundation of medical practice and health for all people.”

“I just wanted to write this letter in support of Alberta doctors and the care I have received in this province ... Alberta doctors and the medical system have contributed greatly to this province. I believe doctors in this province need to be supported for their great work, not vilified. They have provided admirably during this pandemic.”

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](#).