

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Shine A Light

Recognizing four outstanding physicians

In the January-February 2021 edition of Alberta Doctors' Digest, we proudly *Shine A Light* on Drs. Bernhardt, Hemrick, Mackey and Sligl.

While the majority of nominations for AMA's [Shine A Light](#) program come from patients nominating their physicians, the program is also an opportunity for health care professionals to shine a light on and pay tribute to an outstanding physician colleague who they work(ed) or train(ed) with or have been under the care of.

With this first feature of the new year, the *Shine A Light* program recognizes four physicians, two of whom were nominated by health care colleagues and two by patients.



(L to R): Dr. Kristen Hemrick, Dr. Duncan Mackey, Dr. Wendy Sligl (Note: Dr. Trevor Bernhardt - not pictured)

Dr. Trevor Bernhardt

A supportive leader and an exceptional teammate

Dr. Trevor Bernhardt, a southern Alberta family physician with a concentration in ER and sports medicine, was nominated for recognition through the *Shine A Light* program by Sara Phillips, a nursing staff member of the Strathmore Hospital ER department.

“Dr. Bernhardt is the best team lead I have worked with in my 18 years of nursing,” says Sara, adding, “He acknowledges the best way for us to be successful is to work as a team. He’s respectful of all the nurses he works with and values the contributions made by his co-workers. He recognizes a job well done and is the first to debrief and be supportive with all involved when the outcome is not what was hoped for.”

“Trevor is definitely appreciated by all the nurses he works with,” she concludes.

Dr. Kristen Hemrick

A “very special practitioner” with a “kind, caring manner”

The *Shine A Light* program is an opportunity for patients and colleagues to recognize and celebrate member physicians who are “making a difference through their everyday dedication to their patients.”

It’s this “everyday” work ethic – this instinctive desire to look after and care for their patients through thick and thin – that makes the doctors nominated for the SAL program so exceptional to their patients. Their patients’ strong desires to express gratitude, particularly in these unfathomably challenging pandemic times that are coupled with an equally unparalleled time of stress, opposition and resistance in the health care system in Alberta, underlies the SAL nominations of the past several months.

The nominating patient of Dr. Kristen Hemrick, a family physician at the Windermere Plaza Medical Clinic, is no exception. “I can’t begin to tell you how grateful I am to have Dr. Hemrick as my doctor,” says Catherine.

“In a very busy, demanding practice, she takes the time to truly listen and help. She has a kind and caring manner that makes it possible to open up,” she continues. “Dr. Hemrick is intuitive and has emotional intelligence. Combined with her medical training, this makes for a very special practitioner.”

“Without Dr. Hemrick, I wouldn’t be alive,” says Catherine, “much less on the mend. I will always be in her debt and eternally grateful.”

Like many of the SAL nominators, Catherine is conscious of her physician’s humility and lack of pretense. “This poorly described nomination simply doesn’t do her justice,” adds Catherine. “That said, she is such a humble person that she could also be embarrassed and shy about being nominated.”

Truthfully, there has never been a better time for patients and colleagues to recognize the outstanding Alberta physicians in their lives. As Dr. Alison Clarke said when speaking of *Shine A Light*, which was initiated by Dr. Clarke during her 2018-19 tenure as AMA president, “All physicians play advocacy roles with their patients. And it’s really important that we as an organization recognize the advocacy of individual physicians.”

Dr. Duncan Mackey

Treating patients like family – the kind of doctor you want on your side

Sometimes life takes a sudden turn and while it could go careening off in one, bumpy direction, fate seems to step in and set us on the right course. That fate can be as small, or as big, as happening upon the right doctor, in the right place, at the right time.

That's how Dennis describes the circumstances that put him in front of Dr. Duncan Mackey, an emergency physician at Chinook Regional Hospital in Lethbridge, over a year and a half ago. Initial thoughts/guesses of a hematoma in Dennis's upper leg turned to a diagnosis of a stage 3 malignant tumor (sarcoma).

"[Dr. Mackey] understood the severity of my condition and made sure before I left the hospital that I had every test available to him to determine how advanced it was," says Dennis, in his SAL nomination of Dr. Mackey. "He gave me his personal cell number and told me he would get me into an excellent specialist at the Tom Baker Cancer Centre in Calgary, ASAP.

"He was on days off the next day but called my cell that evening to check on me and give me the number of the physician in Calgary and advised me on how to get in as quickly as possible," continues Dennis. "He also had me come back the next day for an MRI and other tests to set me up for the appointment in Calgary."

"I was able to see Dr. Monument at the Tom Baker within four days, get a biopsy and start treatments less than a month after walking into emergency. Even Dr. Monument told me he wasn't sure how I knew Dr. Mackey, but I should be thankful he was on my side, as this was a big reason why I got in so soon."

Over a year later, Dennis has had chemo, radiation and surgery. He's back to work, and scans thus far have been clear.

"I believe everything happens for a reason. Thankfully it was Dr. Mackey that took me on that day in the busy emergency room. He treated me like family and went to bat for me," says Dennis. "Furthermore, he's since randomly contacted me a handful of times to check on progress."

Dr. Wendy Sligl

Heart and soul, skill and dedication

How fitting that with this profile, we shine a light of recognition and honor on a physician who has been immersed for most of the past year in Alberta's battle against COVID-19.

Dr. Wendy Sligl is an intensivist who also works in infectious diseases. Beginning last February and March – as the pandemic crept its way into Canada and Alberta – her practice emphasis decidedly flipped to attending to provincial and local responsibilities as part of responding to and navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Thirza Carpenter is the colleague who nominated Dr. Sligl for recognition by the [Shine A Light](#) program. She says Dr. Sligl is "... an exceptionally motivated and empathetic physician [who] works very hard and long to make sure her patients get exemplary care ... treating them and their families with incredible compassion" and who has never wavered in her commitment to her clinical practice and patients.

In the [SAL nomination](#), Dr. Carpenter says, "As a physician, Wendy is exceptional. She has so much knowledge and is so diligent. When she sees a patient, she really addresses their issues" and, warns Dr. Carpenter, "when you consult her to see one of your patients, you better review their chart because she will quickly know more about that patient than you do!"

Dr. Carpenter notes that much of her colleague's work in intensive care "is trying to help patients and their families through very severe illness, death and making incredibly difficult decisions about goals of care." And that's where Wendy's kind heart comes in. "She is the type of person who is never too busy to answer one more question that a family has; never too busy to do one more task, order one more test, etc., for any of her patients."

"When she speaks to patients and families, she treats them with respect," continues Dr. Carpenter. "There really is no one better than Wendy to help people through these times." Those times can be any time – day or night. "As part of her job, Wendy does call at night, which often entails being in the hospital all night and working the next day. She does not let the long hours affect her judgment or demeanor."

Just prior to the pandemic – almost as if she knew the demands on her time were about to multiply one-hundred-fold – Wendy stepped down from her former position as the University of Alberta Critical Care Residency Program Director.

"This training program can be very tough, with very long hours for the residents," explains Dr. Carpenter. "Wendy always made sure they had a supportive environment ... someone to give them support but still push them to be the best physician they could be. She worked so hard to make sure that the residency program was outstanding, for both medical training and in terms of atmosphere."

Dr. Carpenter is not alone in her admiration of and respect for Dr. Sligl. "I can't think of a single person who does not admire her intelligence, work ethic and compassion. For all these reasons, Wendy truly commands respect" and is clearly so deserving of recognition by the *Shine A Light* program.