

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Why Dr. Cheryl Goldstein gets our #GOAT

We asked Dr. Cheryl Goldstein's #GOAT nominator, a medical student who wishes to remain anonymous, to describe why Dr. Goldstein. Here's what we learned.

I can't think of anyone more deserving of a #GOAT nomination than Cheryl (everyone calls her Cheryl). She is a passionate and dedicated advocate for the wellbeing of medical students at the University of Alberta. In her position as the Associate Dean of Advocacy and Wellbeing, she works tirelessly to support students through their medical school journey. The Office of Advocacy and Wellbeing (OAW) was started under the leadership of [Dr. Mel Lewis](#) (a past #GOAT) and is now run by Cheryl.

Under their guidance, this office has become a kind of one-stop shop for medical students to go to for confidential support. Right from the first day of medical school, Cheryl has ensured that we know we always have a place to go, no matter what issue we are facing. Whether it's an academic, financial or personal challenge, the OAW is always there to help us figure it out. On a more personal note, I can't tell you how comforting it is to know that I can go to the OAW, and Cheryl will not only provide resources to help me navigate any hurdle I am facing but also support me through the process.

Cheryl is one of the kindest and most understanding people I have met. Not only is she working to change the system to better support the wellbeing of students, but she truly embodies the values she advocates for in all her interactions with students. We are so lucky to have her as our Associate Dean!

Tell us about how, when and where you met Cheryl.

I first met Cheryl in 2020 when I was running into some administrative barriers within the university, and I didn't know how to address the issue. Although she wasn't sure how to resolve the matter, she provided me with resources and contacts that were very helpful. What amazed me most about my initial interaction with Cheryl was that she followed up with me after our first meeting to see how the process was going and how I was doing. Not long after that, several personal challenges arose, and I reached out to Cheryl for help navigating the situation.

Like most people, I have internalized some stigma surrounding mental health, so I was very nervous reaching out to her about a personal issue, but I was met with nothing but kindness and empathy. Cheryl was so incredibly supportive, and she was able to refer me to a psychologist at the OAW so that I had long-term support. I have faced several challenges over the past few years – personally and academically – and Cheryl has been unwavering support whenever I needed it.

As a medical student, what 3 words describe the current state of physician wellness in Alberta?

Systemic

Stigma

Under-valued

Can you tell us about some of the positive changes to the medical education and student experience that you and perhaps other students have observed?

(When you nominated Cheryl you wrote, "Cheryl has been an Assistant Dean at the Office of Advocacy and Wellness at the U of A Medical School for the past 4-5 years and in July 2021 she was promoted to Associate Dean. Even in the short time that she has been Associate Dean, she has managed to make significant positive changes to our medical education and to students' experiences in medical school.")

Cheryl (in collaboration with Dr. Victor Do, an alumnus of the U of A MD program) developed a series of sessions on mental health for pre-clerkship students. I think these sessions went a long way in normalizing mental health struggles in medical school – especially the sessions with panels of upper-year students and residents who discussed their struggles with mental health and effective coping strategies. In my friend group, at least, people seemed more likely to discuss their own mental health after attending these sessions.

Under Cheryl's leadership, the OAW has also developed a research arm called *The Well Lab* to support student- and resident-led research on the wellbeing of learners in health care programs and *[Profile, Control]*, which has attracted a cadre of UGME and PGME learners who are helping explore various topics alongside experts from OAW and the Chief Wellness Officer.

In preparing my answers for this article, I asked Dr. Mel Lewis to share her thoughts about Cheryl, as I can only speak about her work within the undergraduate medical program. Dr. Lewis shared that "Cheryl has tried to imbue wellness throughout UGME, PGME and grad studies by extending her support and advocacy, developing resources and interrogating policies that do not support learner wellbeing. The real special sauce with Cheryl is that she is so authentic and kind. I am so thrilled she took over the reins in the OAW office. She will continue to chip away at the aspects of the medical culture that inadvertently erode our wellbeing across our career's continuum (UG, PG, Grad, Faculty)."

What would you like Cheryl to know about how she has influenced you?

Meeting physicians like Cheryl gives me hope for what the medical community can be. I can't yet speak about the health care system from a provider's perspective. Still, even as a medical student, I've had experiences myself and heard about others' experiences that show how challenging it can be to work in health care. The culture in medicine needs to change – people need to know that it's OK not to be OK and that they will be supported when they are not OK. We must create a system that fosters a supportive culture and values wellbeing. I think Cheryl is a perfect example of the type of physician who can bring about the needed change. She truly cares about and puts so much effort into bettering the wellbeing of those around her.

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

I found that shadowing is an excellent way for me to stay motivated during medical school. In pre-clerkship, losing sight of the big picture is easy, especially when an exam is coming up and you feel the information won't stop coming at you down the firehose. For me, shadowing reminds me of the difference that doctors can make in patients' lives and how lucky I am to learn to meet my future patients' needs.

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

The first clue I might not be doing well is when something small that wouldn't usually bother me feels overwhelming.

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

Balancing my wellbeing with school, research, etc. I am learning to prioritize my wellbeing, but it can be hard to take time for yourself when there is so much going on.

What has been positive for you over the last year? Has there been a silver lining in the pandemic for you?

I think it's good that physician wellbeing seems to be being discussed more often now. It is sad that it took the devastating conditions of the pandemic to force the subject into the spotlight. Many amazing people have been working to address the long-standing systemic issues for so long. Still, it seems like the subject is only now at the forefront of many meaningful conversations. I hope these conversations translate into action, and we start to see changes being made to shift the culture in medicine.

Looking to the future, what gives you hope?

Many of my classmates give me hope for the future of medicine. I think they will enact changes in the system that will improve the medical culture and hopefully create a health care system that is more accessible and inclusive for our future patients.

And now for fun, tell us your preference and fill in the blank in each of the following:

Do you prefer mountains or beach?

mountains

Do you prefer cooking or being cooked for?

being cooked for

Would you have a night out or night in?

in

Lose sleep or skip a meal?

lose sleep

Never have I ever:

been to Europe

If you could be any ...

If you could be any age, what age would be and why?

I like the age I'm at now, so I think I would choose to just stay at this age.

If you could be any celebrity, who would you be and why?

Beyoncé (I don't think this one needs an explanation.)

If you could be any kitchen utensil, what would you be and why?

One of those pasta serving spoons so that I could have maximum contact with carbs.

If you could be any Olympic sport's world record holder, which would it be and why?

Bobsled – it looks fun!

If you could be any animal, what would you be and why?

A house cat so I could just lounge in the sun all day.