



The best job in the world

Cathy MacLean MD MCISc MBA FCFP

Summer is a time of good things: camping, hiking, biking, s'mores, sunshine, and fresh fruit and vegetables. It is a time of vacations and lazy days. Summer is also the time of resident orientation. There are more than 1000 medical students starting family medicine residencies across the country. I sat in on our orientation at the University of Calgary this summer and this is what I learned: I have the best job in the world.

All walks of life

Residents come from all over and choose their residencies for many different reasons. It is a time to come home for some and a time to move away for others. It is about settling down and about starting an adventure. It is about getting on with family medicine and about first steps toward enhanced skills programs like emergency medicine, care of the elderly, or global medicine. Our 2-year family medicine training program in Canada is the shortest in the world. But our residents are also among the best trained in the world. We have been told that our residents perform the best on the American Board of Family Medicine examinations—better than American-trained family physicians. Barbara Starfield has also reported data that show that the length of our training programs might actually be one of our strengths.¹ She emphasized that the longer physicians trained the more expensive their care was and the poorer the outcomes for that care were. The literature supporting a valued role for primary care is mounting, and we should be proud of the contributions we make and of the value our residents—the future of family medicine in Canada—bring to patient care.

Family medicine residents come into their training programs enthusiastic, committed, energetic, and ready to embark on a whirlwind of training. They are a talented group. They are also a fantastic reflection of the cultural mosaic of Canada. Our residents have children, are black belts in tae kwon do, speak many languages, have many surprising talents, and are eager for life and for a life in family medicine. How amazing for me when I hear other family physicians talking to residents and declaring, "I have the best job in the world."

Why is talking about what we do and why we love family medicine so important? Orientation is a time to be inspirational as well as practical. This was not about marketing family medicine to undecided medical students. These were residents—their choice has


been made. The positive comments about family medicine helped set the stage for the next 2 years, to reassure residents about their life choice and to share our own enthusiasm for what we do and why we do it. Enthusiasm is recognized as one of the most important characteristics of a teacher. The teaching starts with orientation.

There are more than 30 family medicine programs across Canada. Each program relies on hundreds of family doctors in communities, both urban and rural, to teach and support their programs. The College is proud of our residency accreditation, the standards we set, our examination, the significance of Certification, and the contributions to patient care, population and public health, medical education, and research made by our members from coast to coast to coast.

Summer prescription

Summer is a time of holidays and family. To be good for our patients and good to our learners, our families, and ourselves, summer should offer time to relax and regenerate. I have been increasingly impressed with the literature on physician health. We do not look after our own health very well, and we often do not recognize the effects of skipping meals, not drinking enough water, and not getting enough sleep. We get grouchy and we can get cynical and negative. We might not spend enough time with our family and friends and we might not take the holidays we need. We are not even aware of the effects our habits have on the way we think and subsequently on patient care. We tend to underestimate these effects.

Summer is also about reunions and I have my 25-year medical school reunion this summer. I will spend my holidays on the Bay of Fundy surrounded by the beauty of the Maritimes. I will renew friendships that have been dormant for years, but I will also spend time with friends who have stayed close over the 25 years. It is time for summer holidays! It is time for family and friends, for a good book, for rest and relaxation. It is time well spent; time that reenergizes my enthusiasm for family medicine.

This summer my wish for you is a happy, healthy dose of summer vacation. Getting this rest and relaxation might help more of us remember that we really do have the best job in the world. 

Reference

1. Starfield B. Reinventing primary care: lessons from Canada for the United States. *Health Aff (Millwood)* 2010;29(5):1030-6.

Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 833.