

# What drew me to family medicine continues to make our field special today



Shirley Schipper MD CCFP FCFP

*Dr Shirley Schipper was installed as the 66th President of the CFPC on November 1, 2019, at Family Medicine Forum in Vancouver, BC.*

**A**s a child growing up in Edmonton, Alta, my interest in science sprouted in part because of my father. I remember observing his work as a veterinarian specializing in large animals. One day, when I was about 6, he had me serve as the anesthetist in our backyard as he gelded a pet bunny. I was also fascinated by the insides of horses and cows on visits to the animal pathology laboratory.

During my undergraduate studies I considered various health care careers, and my aunty Anna (a nurse and role model) encouraged me to pursue medicine. My father had developed heart disease, and I watched him navigate chronic, disabling illness in our health system. I wanted to do cardiac research and help in some way.

While studying medicine at the University of Alberta (U of A), I initially thought I would become a surgeon—until I did my rural rotations in family medicine. The differences I saw were the complexity, the relationships, and the wide scope of practice in our specialty. Some of my best and happiest teachers were family doctors.

I became involved in family medicine education as a resident at U of A. My colleagues and I believed that health care and pharmaceutical industry representatives had too much influence over what was being taught, so our program successfully advocated for greater control over our curriculum. Being invited to join an accreditation team led by Dr Allyn Walsh contributed to my growing interest in education and academic medicine.

After completing my residency in 2001, Dr Rick Spooner (CFPC President 1994-1995) invited me to join a teaching clinic in Edmonton. Teaching became one of my favourite activities. I joined U of A's Department of Family Medicine first as a site director and then as the director for postgraduate residency training. I now serve as Vice Dean, Education, for the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry. My interests include faculty coaching, curriculum and program development, and competency-based education and assessment.


Balancing my clinical load with education has been a big part of my well-being as a doctor. We know that if you work in diverse clinical settings or have different scopes of practice that you end up being a happier clinician.<sup>1</sup> When you work with enthusiastic students who are excited about becoming doctors, it reminds you why you did it in the first place. I consider teaching and leadership to be parts of my scope of practice.

In my personal life, my husband, Tim Nerdahl, and I have 2 daughters—Casey (age 13) and Claire (age 12)—and a menagerie of pets.

I am thankful for the many opportunities working with the CFPC has given me. I have participated on several College committees in the areas of education, Certification, and accreditation. I have enjoyed serving as Director-at-Large on the CFPC Board of Directors from 2016-2017 and as President-Elect in 2018-2019. As CFPC President I hope to add to discussions on issues such as physician well-being and the disconnect between the number of women in family medicine and how relatively few there are at higher levels of leadership in the field in Canada.

I am also concerned that many family physicians believe our profession is being devalued, in part owing to other health professions' growing engagement with the public and because some politicians think other providers can do most or all of what we do. I work closely with nurse and nurse practitioner colleagues in Alberta and value them highly; however, in a few provinces certain health care professionals have created independent clinics and claim they provide better, more accessible care than family doctors do.

This is definitely threatening to family physicians who provide excellent care and believe we have something special to offer our patients—comprehensive, continuous care in the context of relationship-based medicine. I think patients feel the same.

I look forward to engaging with colleagues from across Canada this year to discuss the current state of family medicine and its future. 

#### Reference

1. Weidner AKH, Phillips RL, Fang B, Peterson LE. Burnout and scope of practice in new family physicians. *Ann Fam Med* 2018;16:200-5.

Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 846.