

ROOTED IN RURAL

ELKFORD PHYSICIAN DR. CHANTAL SERWATKEWICH'S JOURNEY IN FAMILY MEDICINE



For Dr. Chantal Serwatkewich, the drive to care for others has always been at the heart of her journey. Long before she became a family physician, she spent nearly a decade working as a registered nurse in her hometown of Fernie. But over time, she felt the pull to take her career further. Serwatkewich decided to pursue medical school, launching a new chapter at the University of Calgary. And although the bustling city delivered a positive experience, rural BC called her home.

"I have always lived rurally and worked as a rural nurse," Serwatkewich reflects. "It just made sense that my path as a physician would lead me back to small communities."

Today, Dr. Serwatkewich practices in Elkford, a close-knit mining town nestled in the Rocky Mountains. Her decision to build her practice here was as much about heart as it was about practicality. Her partner, a lifelong Elkford resident, works for the District of Elkford, and both of their families are rooted in the Elk Valley. It was the natural choice—a place where her professional calling and personal life could intertwine.

Elkford, established in the 1970s, may be a young town, but it's rich in community spirit. Known as the wilderness capital of B.C., Elkford is a close-knit community with a shared love for vast, natural spaces. Often referred to as a place 'where the road ends and the wild begins', Elkford is unique in that, although it's small in size, it has a variety of amenities, recreation facilities and conveniences found in larger centres, such as an aquatic centre, conference centre, arena, and recreational programming.

"I have a varied practice from newborns to the elderly. A lot of my patients are people I see outside of work—at the post office, at the grocery store," she shares. "Sometimes it can be a bit awkward and at times you're navigating boundaries, but mostly, it's really rewarding. You build a deeper connection with the people you care for."

That connection has made a difference in care delivery. Early in her career, Serwatkewich became the family physician to a longtime acquaintance. Encouraging this patient to undergo routine cancer screening—something they were reluctant to do—led to the early detection of a cancer that is now considered cured. "If we didn't already have that relationship, they might not have agreed to screening," Serwatkewich says. "Moments like that remind me why I chose this path and the impact it can have."

Practicing rural medicine comes with its challenges. With specialist care hours away, Chantal's role often extends beyond the typical. She performs procedures like skin biopsies and joint injections at the local clinic—services that save her patients what can be long, exhausting trips. At the same time, navigating the limited access to specialized care remains one of the greatest hurdles for her and her patients.

Yet for all its challenges, rural family medicine offers rewards that urban practice often can't match: caring for entire families across generations, watching children grow, and building a true continuity of care. "Having one provider who knows your story and family history leads to better medical outcomes," Serwatkewich notes. "And I'm proud to be that person for many families in Elkford."

Outside the clinic, Serwatkewich finds balance in the wild beauty that surrounds her. Whether hiking, fishing, hunting, or training her energetic dog, Roo, she embraces the outdoors with the same passion she brings to her work. "I'm lucky to live somewhere that allows me such a great work-life balance," she says. Dr. Serwatkewich's journey is a strong example of rural medicine at its best—where deep community ties, continuity of care, and genuine connection transform a job into a lifelong vocation.



East Kootenay
Division of Family Practice
An FPSC initiative