

PRIMARY CARE BEYOND CLINIC WALLS

Throughout the year, the Division shares stories from family physicians across the East Kootenay to highlight the experiences, leadership, and perspectives shaping primary care in our region.

As September kicks-off and the busy fall season begins, we're pleased to share the latest story in our regional family doctor series: Dr. Ashlee King reflects on rural medicine, physician leadership, and the importance of building strong relationships with patients, colleagues, and communities.

Meet Dr. Ashlee King, Cranbrook-based family physician

For Dr. Ashlee King, rural medicine is about far more than providing medical care.

It's about relationships, community, and helping people navigate every stage of life. It's about understanding the unique needs of rural communities and working alongside colleagues and partners to strengthen the health-care system for everyone.

As a family physician in Cranbrook and physician lead with the East Kootenay Division of Family Practice Board of Directors, those values guide her work every day.

"What I appreciate most about rural family medicine is the opportunity to build relationships with patients over time. It allows me to continue learning and growing while caring for people through all stages of life," says Dr. King. "That continuity of care, combined with the trust that develops through those relationships, is what makes family medicine such meaningful and rewarding work."

Dr. King's commitment to continuity of care was shaped early in her career through her training experiences in Prince George and rural Alberta, where she saw firsthand the impact rural physicians have.

"I was inspired by the health-care teams I worked with — people who were skilled, enthusiastic, dependable, and deeply committed to their communities," she says. "I wanted to be part of that kind of team, and I found that opportunity in Cranbrook."



While rural medicine comes with challenges, it also offers opportunities that many physicians find deeply rewarding. In the East Kootenay, family doctors often maintain a broad scope of practice, collaborate closely with colleagues, and have the chance to make a tangible difference in the lives of the people they serve, both within and beyond clinic walls.

"Rural family physicians have a unique perspective within the health-care system because we work closely with patients at every stage of their life," says Dr. King. "We often help coordinate investigations, specialist care, hospital transitions, and community supports, which means we see firsthand where the system works well and where patients face challenges or barriers."

By working across clinics, hospitals, and community services, rural family physicians gain a deep understanding of how care is delivered and where improvements could make the greatest difference for patients and communities.

"Rural physicians are uniquely positioned to identify opportunities for change and collaborate on practical solutions that improve access, coordination, and patient outcomes," says Dr. King.

Since joining the EK Division Board in 2023, Dr. King has brought the perspective of frontline family medicine to regional and provincial discussions about physician recruitment, access to care, and health-system planning, helping to ensure the needs of patients and providers remain at the centre of those conversations. Her commitment to physician leadership and system improvement recently led her to complete the SFU Leadership and Management Development Program, further strengthening her ability to support positive change in health care.

"There are very real and complex challenges in rural health care. Recruitment and retention remain ongoing concerns, and many patients continue to face long wait times for specialist services, diagnostics, and mental health supports," says Dr. King. "Family physicians are an important part of the solution to strengthen the health-care system. When we are supported to contribute beyond our clinics, we can help drive improvements that benefit patients, providers, and communities alike."

While health care continues to evolve, the values that drew Dr. King to family medicine remain unchanged: service, connection, lifelong learning, and trust.

Whether caring for patients, mentoring colleagues, or helping improve the health-care system in the East Kootenay, Dr. King remains guided by the same belief that first inspired her career — that meaningful patient relationships, connected colleagues, and resilient, responsive communities are at the heart of exceptional primary care.

