



Fernie family physician Dr. Soetaert with MOA Sarann Press

EK MOAs play integral role in running efficient family practice clinics

Regional physicians express support for the increased MOA training and educational opportunities available through MOA Network and MOA Day

MOA Sarann Press will never forget the call she took during her first month on the job. An elderly patient phoned the family practice clinic reporting her husband lost his life to suicide. Press tracked down the patient's residential address, reported the incident to 911, called the family physician, and arranged for care of the elderly woman.

The family physician, Dr. Soetaert, attended to both the deceased and the wife. Then he immediately checked on Press.

"That's the moment I knew this job, in this clinic, was for me. It was a very heavy day, but I know I helped. And when Dr. Soetaert checked in and asked how I was doing, I felt supported. Support is so important in this job."

That day was more than 21 years ago. Press has been working as an MOA in The Leroux Clinic alongside Dr. Soetaert ever since. Over the years, she has been the gatekeeper to the clinic, ensuring the day-to-day operations run smoothly.

“Ultimately, I work to make sure Dr. Soetaert is set up for success. Any way I can help support that, I do—from coffee and snacks, to supplies, to reception and scheduling, to patient management, forms, charts, policy, and administration. I work hard, so Dr. Soetaert can work best.”

Dr. Soetaert highly values the role Press plays in the clinic. He prioritizes a clinic culture of confidence and communication and encourages Sarann to take part in training opportunities, such as the MOA Day and EK MOA Network.

“I am a firm believer that the more training and education MOAs can obtain to increase their medical knowledge, build skills around communication, increase their confidence, and support their mental health, the more effective they are in their position, leading to a better operated clinic, which directly impacts how my time is spent and how efficiently my day runs,” said Dr. Soetaert.

The East Kootenay MOA Support and Resource Network was established in 2020 through a collaboration led by EK Division of Family Practice and the Practice Support Program. The goal was to foster educational, personal, and professional growth opportunities for MOAs to support job success, satisfaction, and retention. Sarann Press was integral to launching the EK MOA Support Network.

“I love my job. I truly do. But this work can be very heavy and high-pressure, with lots of administrative change, evolving policy, conflict resolution, and shifting information,” said Press. “MOAs need to be connected to one another, we need to be aware of best practice, we need opportunities for training, and to be able to lean on each other during tough days. That’s why I helped establish the MOA network – because I want other MOAs to find reward and success in this role, long-term.”

The second annual MOA Day was held in Cranbrook, B.C., on Sept 30, 2023. Supported by the Practice Support Program and EK Division, the event brought together 31 EK MOAs for a day of learning, networking, and sharing ideas and resources. The event was well received by attendees, who expressed appreciation for the opportunity to connect with peers, as well as for the training opportunities around psychological safety, effective communication, and teamwork.

“If you have an MOA who has good experience, training, and confidence, they offer excellent support for the physician, because MOAs know the patient population very well,” said Soetaert. “I’ve lost count the number of times Sarann has positively impacted patient care because she has the confidence to talk with me and the skills to communicate observations of either the patient’s behaviour or their personal situation.

“Investing in MOAs education and supports can be financially difficult for physicians and clinics, so programs such as the MOA Network and MOA Day are a welcomed resource, and a helpful support for not only MOAs, but for us physicians. Look, it comes down to: the better the MOAs are, the better the docs can work, and the more patients who can be seen.”

Kimberley physician, Dr. Shaun van Zyl, shares his colleague’s sentiments about the importance of supporting MOAs, which is why he attended this year’s MOA Network event.

“Medical Office Assistants play an integral role in running efficient Family Practice Clinics. The MOA role is critical to providing access to high-quality care for patients and improving professional satisfaction for physicians,” said van Zyl.

“Thank you to our MOAs and thank you to PSP and EK Division for supporting the MOA Network and hosting the annual MOA Day.”