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Dr. Lori Wik: Leading the Way in Compassionate Care

Wik has been a driving force behind innovative healthcare programs in the region and is co-leading the Curiosity, Frailty & Palliative Care project

East Kootenay, B.C. — Dr. Lori Wik has dedicated her career to providing exceptional care in the East Kootenay region. A general internal medicine specialist, Dr. Wik brought her expertise to the region 13 years ago, after completing her medical training in Edmonton. Her decision to settle in Cranbrook wasn't just about finding a place to practice medicine—it was about building a life in the community she loves. Born in Kimberley and married to a Cranbrook native, Dr. Wik returned to her roots to raise her family and pursue a career.

Upon joining a practice with two other internists in Cranbrook, Dr. Wik quickly became an integral part of the local healthcare system, providing both acute care at the hospital, including ICU care, and community-based care in partnership with family doctors. She also became deeply involved in healthcare program leadership. About ten years ago, Dr. Wik collaborated with internist Dr. Errin Sawatsky and community nurses to establish the Heart Function Program, which now serves over 800 patients throughout the East Kootenay. This program, the largest of its kind in any rural area within Interior Health, delivers comprehensive chronic disease management for patients with

congestive heart failure. Following the success of the Heart Function Program, Dr. Wik and internist Dr. Moninder Vaid co-founded the Respiratory Clinic, focusing on chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and asthma.

Dr. Wik's experiences with patients suffering from chronic diseases like COPD and heart failure led to a passion for enhancing palliative care.

"Chronic disease palliative care patients can often get swept along in the current of medicine—flaring up, receiving treatment, getting a little better, only to flare up again," said Wik. "We focus so much on providing excellent care, which our patients need and deserve, but we sometimes forget to hit the pause button and ask, 'is this what you really want? What truly matters to you?'"

This passion led to Dr. Wik's role as a co-lead for the *Curiosity, Frailty & Palliative Care* project, supported by the East Kootenay Division of Family Practice and Shared Care - Partners for Patients.

"The main thing I hope to communicate to my colleagues is the idea of a pause button, I think if we can just get the word out that it's important and acceptable to hit the pause button, and to take a moment to have the What Matters to You conversations with patients, we may be surprised at what we learn about how they want to live in their last chapter."

One example Dr. Wik shares is of a patient who, after being told she was not a candidate for a lung transplant, came to Dr. Wik asking how she could change her care in a way that made sure she accomplished her goals over the next few months. With Dr. Wik's support, she was able to spend her last months checking off her "to-do list", such as preparing her finances to leave a monetary gift for her neighbour in recognition for all the help the neighbour had offered during the patients' final years.

"Another patient, her goal was quality time at home with family," said Wik. "She passed away in her sleep at home of kidney failure but the week before that happened, she was breathing comfortably, and even baked cookies with her grandkids in her own home. That was such a triumph."

Dr. Wik is not only focused on changing how care is provided but also on shifting the broader cultural approach to palliative care. As the *Curiosity, Frailty & Palliative Care* Project continues to evolve, Dr. Wik is optimistic and excited about the future. With a dedicated team of like-minded professionals, she is confident that they can create something truly transformative for the community.

"As part of this project work, I've been leading a frailty focus group on the development of a tool designed to identify frail patients at risk of hospitalization or death in the coming years," said Wik. "This tool, set to be rolled out in September, aims to trigger conversations and interventions that align with patients' goals and values. I'm excited about the potential of this tool and the opportunities it presents."

Dr. Lori Wik has become a driving force in reshaping healthcare in the region. Her impact is felt in the innovative programs she's helped develop, the compassionate care she delivers, and the lasting changes she's making in the lives of countless patients, and their families.

"What matters to me is providing holistic care that respects patients' autonomy and dignity while delivering excellent, appropriate medical care," said Wik, reflecting on the question she so often

asks her patients. "I'm committed to supporting patients to live their best lives within their limitations and also to empowering family doctors and other professionals to help their patients do the same."

To learn more about the Curiosity, Frailty & Palliative care project or become involved visit <https://www.linkedin.com/company/curiosity-frailty-palliative-care-project/>