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## **Meet Cranbrook family physician Dr. Greg Andreas**

*At the helm of the new Curiosity, Frailty & Palliative Care project, Dr. Andreas's approach to care prioritizes understanding each person through learning their unique stories and what matters most to them*

**East Kootenay, B.C.** -- Dr. Greg Andreas's journey through medicine is a story of compassion, growth, and a deep-seated commitment to understanding what truly matters to his patients. Born in a mining town in Springs, South Africa, his early struggles with ADHD shaped his path, leading him to discover his strengths lay in hands-on, practical work. This practicality drew him to medicine and family practice, which was a natural fit for his problem-solving skills and love for biology. He found an early professional niche in trauma care and rural medicine, with a growing interest in team-based care.

His career took him from South Africa to Canada, where he and his wife established themselves in Peguis, Manitoba, the largest First Nations reserve in the province. Here, he was immersed in community, culture, and connection. His experiences shaped his approach to patient care, emphasizing not just treating conditions but understanding the whole person—their stories, passions, and what brings them joy.

One transformative moment for Dr. Andreas occurred while providing palliative care for a patient with end-stage colon cancer.

"Given the history I was provided that this person 'lived by himself deep in the bush,' I assumed he preferred solitude and would want a private hospital room," said Andreas. "Our care centered around this assumption, as well as symptom management. My own and my team's biased belief was that good care for this dying man meant providing morphine and a comfortable bed."

It was a conversation with this man about his life—his adventures living in the middle of the wilderness and his encounters with wildlife—that changed everything.

“One night, as I waited for the ambulance to arrive, I took a moment to sit by his bedside,” Andreas recalled. “He began to share remarkable stories of wild animals, nature and his life. He spoke of a time he found a bear leaving his cabin, stealing his bag of flour, and how he chose not to shoot it because it reminded him of a friendly neighbour borrowing ingredients.

“And there I was, giving him a prescription for morphine and seeing only a frail man dying from cancer. At the end of one of his stories, there was a long pause. He took my hand and said, ‘Doctor, I don’t want to die alone.’”

This interaction helped Dr. Andreas realize that true care meant honouring not just the illness, but the person’s life and their story. With the help of a compassionate social worker, they reconnected the man with his community. Hunters, fishermen, and friends visited him after that, transforming his final chapter of life from isolation to connection.

"His symptoms were suddenly far easier to stay ahead of. Through his stories, he gifted me his Canada—the one I was new to—and what he so generously shared with me has captivated me ever since. In those moments, we both helped each other live," said Andreas.

This experience became a cornerstone of Dr. Andreas's philosophy—shifting from seeing frail patients as a collection of pathology and symptoms to understanding them as people with rich histories, interests, and a story that deserves the best possible ending.

“I began joining people on their journey. Seeing it as our journey,” he said. “We stayed in Manitoba for seven years and it was an incredible experience. Then we took a road trip to explore B.C. and seized the opportunity to work in Cranbrook. That was over 17 years ago.”

Dr. Andreas's work in the Cranbrook community extends beyond family practice into palliative care and long-term patient support. He champions team-based approaches as part of the Whole Community Palliative Rounds, recognizing that complex medical and emotional needs require a team and community effort.

As he inches closer to retirement and pursues work that aligns with his passions, Dr. Andreas continues to advocate for compassionate, person-centered, team-based care. He embraces the ***What Matters to You*** movement, advocating for a paradigm shift in healthcare. His legacy is not just in the lives he's touched, but in the mindset he's shaped within the medical community.

“I think the most important thing for people to understand, is that you – the person, perhaps as a patient, physician, nurse, caregiver...are enough. Be you and be incredibly curious. Then let us walk beside each other as we build with each other our best possible last chapters of life.”

Dr. Greg Andreas and his colleague Dr. Lori Wik, an internal medicine specialist in Cranbrook, are leading a new ***Curiosity, Frailty & Palliative Care*** regional project, which aims to embed a palliative approach across the health system that gives a person their best possible last chapters of life.

To learn more or get involved visit: [www.linkedin.com/company/curiosity-frailty-palliative-care-project](http://www.linkedin.com/company/curiosity-frailty-palliative-care-project).