

Dear Members,

Many of you will know I am a Family Physician. I am going to take a bit of leeway here to say how very disappointed, though unsurprised, I was by the CaRMS Match Day results for Family Medicine in Alberta. To quote my colleagues, Dr. Samantha Myhr and Dr. Jon Hilner, Presidents of the Alberta Medical Association (AMA) Section of Rural Medicine and Section of Family Medicine, respectively: "A total of 42 family medicine spots were left unfilled, including 19 at the University of Alberta in Edmonton and 14 at the University of Calgary. The percentage of unmatched at most of our distributed rural sites was even more shocking: Lethbridge 22%, Grand Prairie 33% and Medicine Hat 71%. In contrast, our neighbours to the west had only two empty seats from an even larger total, and Saskatchewan was able to match completely."

Drs. Myhr and Hilner also wrote: "We need to improve the capacity of those [family physicians] we have retained and treat any further loss as unacceptable. This starts with appropriately and tangibly valuing the important role of physicians providing comprehensive care.....The best way to increase capacity in the short and medium-term is to demonstrate to the existing workforce that they are respected and valued."

If you talk to friends and colleagues attempting to find their own family physician after a retirement or change in practice scope, anecdotally there is a significant shortage of family physicians in Alberta. According to the Find a Doc website, **in the Edmonton Zone - from April 2019 to March 2020 - there were 285 physicians accepting new patients. This January 2023, there were only 47.** That is 238 fewer physicians with open practices in the Edmonton region alone. Provincially in the same period, the count of family physicians accepting patients went from 887 to 254 (29% of 887). The Physician and Family Support Program reports that requests for help finding a family physician have increased >250% in three years, from 147 requests in 2019, to 372 requests in 2022.

Increasingly, I believe it is apparent to both physicians and patients that comprehensive family medicine is the essential foundation of a system that works for us all. There is something positive in all this. Despite all the issues, political, administrative and financial, there are many dedicated family physicians remaining, who still care immensely. "When we champion family medicine, we are championing an entire health care system, present and future. That's including patients not yet born and physicians not yet in the arena. That's a lot. It's ok to be tired. It's tiring work. It's how we get up that matters. *And we are getting up with integrity, spirit, humour and the capacity to know that, even when we are fatigued, we still know why we are doing the work and we drive forward,*" Dr. Usha Maharaj, family physician. Many of our specialty colleagues have been striving alongside their family physician colleagues, while dealing with their own challenges, some the same and some different.

Let's be especially kind to each other this month: include a compliment or little thank you in your referral and consult letters (I can't explain how much this brightens my day); send a thank you to a colleague through the AMA Shine On program (launching soon). We are all tired, but let's keep getting back up, knowing that what we do matters, and that we are cheering for each other.

I encourage you to look at the [referral issues letter](#) if you have not yet had a chance to do so. EZMSA will continue to bring the content to key stakeholders currently doing work on referral processes, to affect positive change for all physicians and the patients for which we care.

Please continue bringing your ideas to EZMSA. As always, feel free to contact me directly with any concerns. Let's continue to build a community of physicians that support each other and improve the lives of our patients.

Warmest regards,



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President 2023

**Mission:** Physicians Advocating for Health

**Vision:** Engaged Physicians; Sustainable Healthcare; Health Community

**Values:** Advocacy; Integrity; Growth and Learning; Community Connection

To contact the EZMSA Physician Advisor: <https://albertazmsa.com/physician-advisor>