

Dr Sharon Salloum: An exceptional physician, teacher, and mentor

Medical student
Pretty Verma interviews
general practitioner
and teacher
Dr Sharon Salloum.

Pretty Verma

Dr Salloum is well known by students and faculty at UBC as much more than just the former associate dean of the Medical Undergraduate Program of Student Affairs. She is probably most recognized as an invaluable team member, passionate advocate, and warm friend; nearly every student and staff member who knows her can recount a tale of when Dr Salloum was there for them in a time of need.

Dr Salloum has a diverse educational background. She began with studies in English literature and followed this with work as a speech pathologist for 9 years. At that point she became interested in medicine. "I felt I needed a change and new challenge," she explains. "I wanted to be on the medical side of [speech pathology] issues, rather than continuing on the rehab side." She began a PhD in education before being accepted to McMaster University for her medical undergraduate degree. She recalls the time as one of the most rewarding in her career. "The day I was accepted to medical school really stands out—in



Dr Salloum (centre) and students (L to R) Thomas de los Reyes, Elisa Kharazi, Sherry Hu, Pretty Verma, and Anu Ghuman.

those days they phoned you, so I had taken the day off work just in case the call came," she said.

When she graduated, she worked as a family practitioner and lecturer, focusing on working with Aboriginal populations—experiences that had a profound impact. Dr Salloum describes her most rewarding experiences as connecting with Aboriginal patients in Sioux Lookout, organizing ENT visits to northwestern Ontario to ensure that children with hearing problems had ongoing care, and her time as a family physician and director of the sexual assault centre in Maple, Ontario.

When she moved to BC to join family in Ladner, she continued her

practice and joined the education team at UBC as the course director for Year 1 Clinical Skills. She would move on to become assistant dean of student affairs, and later associate dean—a role she filled for 6 years. She considers these roles as some of her greatest successes. "I think the scenarios I wrote for communications skills were interesting to students and helped them see how complicated and important our role as communicators can be." Indeed, medical students today can clearly recount which standardized patient profile they were confronted with in that course, and how much they gained from the experience.

Getting involved with student

This article has been peer reviewed.

Ms Verma is a UBC medical student in the class of 2015.

support at the medical school was also very important to Dr Salloum, stemming from her own medical school experience. “I found the first year of medical school difficult, personally and academically. I think that’s why I wanted to work in student affairs—to provide support to others who needed it during the challenging transition time.” Regarding her work as associate dean of student affairs she says, “It has been a great privilege working with students, [to ensure] that support services for students are available across our distributed program. These 6 years have been the high point of my career.” Motivated by the prospect of solving problems, getting involved with people, and figuring out how to help, Dr Salloum has acted as a leader in many fields, in many ways. She says, “I don’t think I have an interest in leadership per se—it just seems reasonable to want to organize and run things.”

Dr Salloum is modest about her role as a leader in the medical community. “Most of us would like to think that we consciously made the big decisions that resulted in success in our professional lives. As I look back, it was largely serendipity.” Success, however, can be counted in many ways beyond leadership engagement

and professional accomplishments: Dr Salloum considers it a success that she is able to stay connected to friends from before she began her career in medicine, pursues passions outside of medicine like cooking for her family,

“It’s hard to slow down, but I think we can slow down our minds and our hearts, to be present with our partners, our children, and our patients.”

and thoroughly enjoys a good book. “My undergraduate degree was in honours English. Knowing and loving literature is a source of comfort and way to keep life and living in perspective.”

Naturally, she does have advice for young physicians stepping into the complex, challenging, and rewarding field of medicine. “None of us is superhuman, and we need to know what we can manage,” she says. She stresses how important it is for students

to recognize that medical training is hard work, as is being a physician. “Once you recognize the demands of medicine, it’s obviously important to work with family and friends to figure out how to fulfill work demands and other responsibilities of home and personal life. There is a constant tension, and it’s important to explore that tension with family—don’t pretend it’s not there.” For students who are (or will be) raising families, Dr Salloum believes it’s important to appreciate each moment and each experience as it occurs. “It’s hard to slow down,” she says, “but I think we can slow down our minds and our hearts, to be present with our partners, our children, and our patients.” She encourages students to take time off to spend with their children, asking, “In the long run, when you look back over your career, is there any difference in having worked 40 years or 38 years?”

Dr Salloum believes that physicians have a lot to be grateful for. “Our profession allows us to have so much and to do so much. The potential for interesting, absorbing, and fulfilling work is limitless. But, for that to happen, you have to keep your mind open, and take the occasional risk.” **BCMJ**



THE EXPEDITED INJURED WORKERS CLINIC

Your injured workers can be seen by leading specialists within weeks.

VANCOUVER - NEW WESTMINSTER

FAX YOUR REFERRAL TO: **604.648.9744**
SPECIALISTCLINIC.CA
 TEL: 604.737.7464



KNEE • SHOULDER • HIP • FOOT & ANKLE • HAND • ELBOW & WRIST • SPINE