

in memoriam

Dr Renee Ryan 1930–2012

Renee Ryan was one of seven children born into a banking family in Regina. To her parents' surprise, she announced in her late teens that she had been accepted at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, as a medical student. Apparently she had negotiated the process without adult help, in an era when female medical students were a rarity.

She qualified in 1955, and after completing a residency program at St. Paul's Hospital she moved to Smithers to work as an assistant to a doctor who had been serving the isolated community singlehandedly. The physician was an ex-serviceman from the Second World War with a great deal of wartime surgical experience. Dr Renee Ryan, then in her mid-twenties, found herself first assisting with, then performing, major surgeries. Local judges and lawyers were surprised to encounter a young woman presenting and commenting on medical evidence in court. In the 1950s this was not a role in which you would expect to find a woman at all, let alone a woman of her young age.

In 1965 Renee left Smithers to practise in Surrey, and she later moved to Vancouver. In the early 1970s she was offered a medical administrative position with Canada Pension, later becoming the medical director for pension assessments in Vancouver—a position she held for more than 20 years.

Renee was a member of a large extended family, and she also had a large group of friends from many different backgrounds. She was always there for family and friends as a confidante, problem solver, or just a listening ear—her home in Vancouver always had an open door.

In her early 70s her health began to fail, and to her great sadness she was forced to give up her Corvette, which she loved to drive fast. She replaced it with a new Lincoln, which she drove for a few years until she gave up driving altogether.

Renee was a lover of art, as anyone who visited her apartment could attest. Up until her last few months she enjoyed attending exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery, to which she had been a donor.

Her one wish in her final years was to continue living independently in

her comfortable apartment overlooking the Fraser River in New Westminster. With dedicated home support she succeeded, dying in her own bed on 22 November 2012.

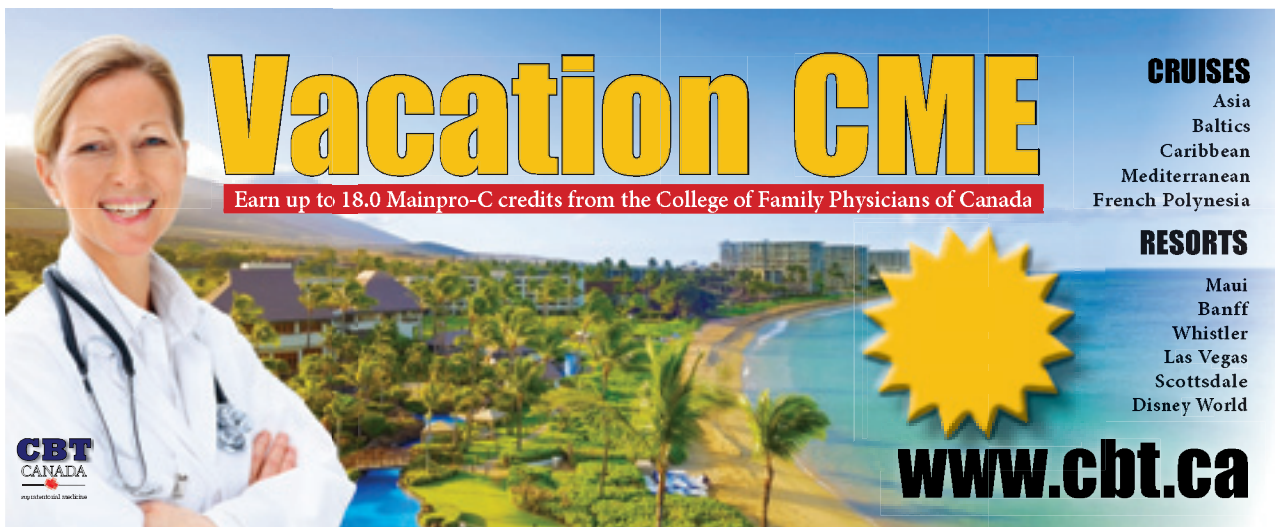
—John O'Brien-Bell, MD
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