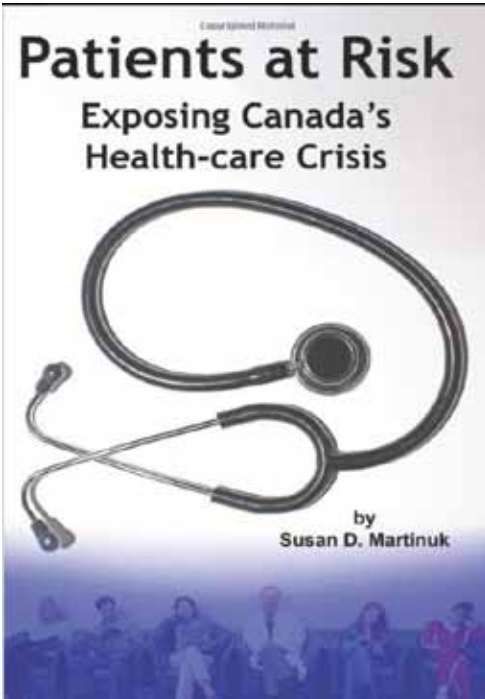


# News

We welcome news items of less than 300 words; we may edit them for clarity and length. News items should be emailed to [journal@doctorsofbc.ca](mailto:journal@doctorsofbc.ca) and must include your mailing address, telephone number, and email address. All writers should disclose any competing interests.



## Book review: *Patients at risk: Exposing Canada's health-care crisis*

By Susan D. Martinuk. Winnipeg: Frontier Centre for Public Policy, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-7776577-4-1. Paperback, 264 pages.

Susan Martinuk is a Vancouver-based journalist and research fellow in health care for the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, an independent Winnipeg-based think tank. This book, published by the Frontier Centre in 2021, begins with the stories of five patients who endured prolonged suffering and poor outcomes while waiting for specialized medical care, and lays blame squarely at the feet of a “system’ that has lost sight of its *raison d’être* and now functions more to constrain medical care than provide it.”

The author argues that the tenets of Canadian medicare enshrined in the Canada Health

Act in 1984 (public administration, comprehensiveness, universality, portability, and accessibility) represent tragic myths when viewed from the patient’s perspective. She touches on the history of publicly funded health care in Canada, then reviews two legal challenges to medicare, beginning with the successful *Chaoulli v. Quebec* decision (Supreme Court of Canada, 2005). She then proceeds to an in-depth analysis of the ongoing case of *Cambie Surgeries Corporation v. BC*, initially unsuccessful in the BC Supreme Court in 2020, currently awaiting a decision by the BC Court of Appeal, and expected by all players to be ultimately decided by the Supreme Court of Canada. Martinuk is uncompromising in her support for Cambie surgeon Dr Brian Day and condemns what she sees as the misguided role played by the government of BC, the defendant in this ongoing litigation; hence the title of Chapter 20: “The BC Government v. Common Sense.”

Available for streaming on all podcast platforms



Martinuk’s two final chapters, “How to Make Health Care Better” and “Where Do We Go from Here,” detail in broad strokes her prescription for reform, which involves acknowledging medicare’s failings; abandoning rigid ideology; and separating politics from health, care, and planning for the long term, including the establishment of a Canadian hybrid public/private system embraced by other countries with better-ranked health care systems.

*Patients at Risk* is eloquently written, moves along quickly, and is carefully referenced by an experienced journalist who presents a compelling argument for a major refit in Canadian medicare. The patient anecdotes are especially poignant, and while necessarily subjective, they continually remind the reader that health care exists to serve patients, and that a system that places ideology ahead of patient care is destined for failure.

Martinuk’s book is a concise and worthwhile read. It will elicit applause from readers frustrated by their experience with Canadian medicare and eager for change, and condemnation from

those who fear that any venture into hybrid public/private care will lead to the extinction of a system that represents the very cornerstone of the Canadian identity.

—David Esler, MD, CCFP(EM)

*Dr Esler has practised emergency medicine in and around Vancouver for 34 years. He is also a clinical associate professor of emergency medicine at the University of British Columbia and a member of the BCMJ Editorial Board.*

### Real-Time Virtual Support: Much-needed rural and remote assistance during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact rural and remote regions in Northern BC at a disproportionate rate compared with the rest of the province. More than 100 patients have had to be transferred out of Northern Health since the start of the fourth wave to hospitals with more ICU capacity. The vast majority of those have been COVID-positive. And with

vaccination rates lower than in other areas of the province, a higher percentage of the population is at risk of getting critically ill from the fifth wave.

The impact on health care workers in a remote community like Chetwynd (population just over 3000) is far-reaching. The help being offered by Real-Time Virtual Support (RTVS) physicians, who are available 24/7 over Zoom, has been welcomed with open arms. And physicians are reporting that RTVS is having an impact on outcomes and helping alleviate the challenges of rural medicine during the pandemic.

RTVS virtual providers are physicians with experience in rural medicine and are dedicated to offering shoulder-to-shoulder support to physicians, residents, nurse practitioners, and nurses—any rural health care worker—over Zoom. The RTVS physicians, who are based throughout the province, can help with urgent and non-urgent cases and questions, including case consultations, second opinions, ongoing patient support, point-of-care ultrasound, and simulations.

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**Doctors Helping Doctors 24 hrs/day, 7 days/week**



The Physician Health Program of British Columbia offers help 24/7 to B.C. doctors and their families for a wide range of personal and professional problems: physical, psychological and social. If something is on your mind, give us a call at 1-800-663-6729 or visit [www.physicianhealth.com](http://www.physicianhealth.com).

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*Drs Bron Finkelstein (left) and Jodie Graham (right), from Chetwynd, are frequent users of the Real-Time Virtual Support pathways for providers.*

When a critically ill patient cannot be managed at a rural site, RTVS physicians can also step in to coordinate their transfer to a larger centre through the Patient Transfer Network run by BC Emergency Health Services. The transfer is made to a centre with available ICU capacity. In recent months, due to critically ill COVID-19 patients, patient transfer has become more common.

Dr Bron Finkelstein, a new-to-practice doctor in Chetwynd, where the hospital has just five beds, says RTVS physicians have been instrumental in making stressful situations manageable with advice, guidance when a colleague is needed, and taking on patient transfers during the depths of a difficult situation. With RTVS support, the patient can be stabilized while a transfer is being arranged.

Dr Jodie Graham, chief of staff at Chetwynd Hospital, has trained and worked in rural medicine for over a decade, including in rural

Alberta, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon, and agrees that RTVS is the best thing to happen to rural medicine.

Dr Matt Petrie is an RTVS physician who has helped coordinate patient transfers for the Chetwynd team, pointing out that it is sometimes difficult for doctors in urban centres to understand the situation on the ground in a rural centre. As a member of the RUDi (emergency) team in RTVS, he understands that part of his job is to advocate for rural providers who may not be able to advocate for themselves and their community during a stressful situation.

#### **Call early and call often**

Dr Finkelstein urges health care providers to call RTVS early—before they get too busy to call—and to call often—when they have a significant case, a challenging case, a case where a second opinion would be beneficial. He's never

encountered someone who was unwilling or unhappy to talk. Providers throughout the province are encouraged to reach out for support.

For more information on how to get started with RTVS, visit <https://rccbc.ca/rtvs/getting-started>.

## **Prescribing nature to improve health**

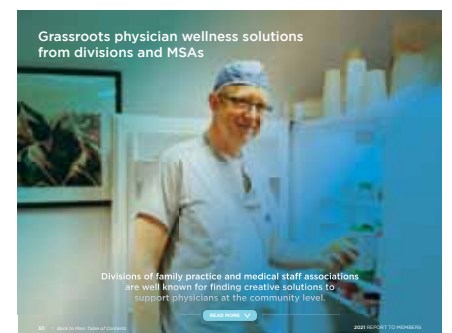
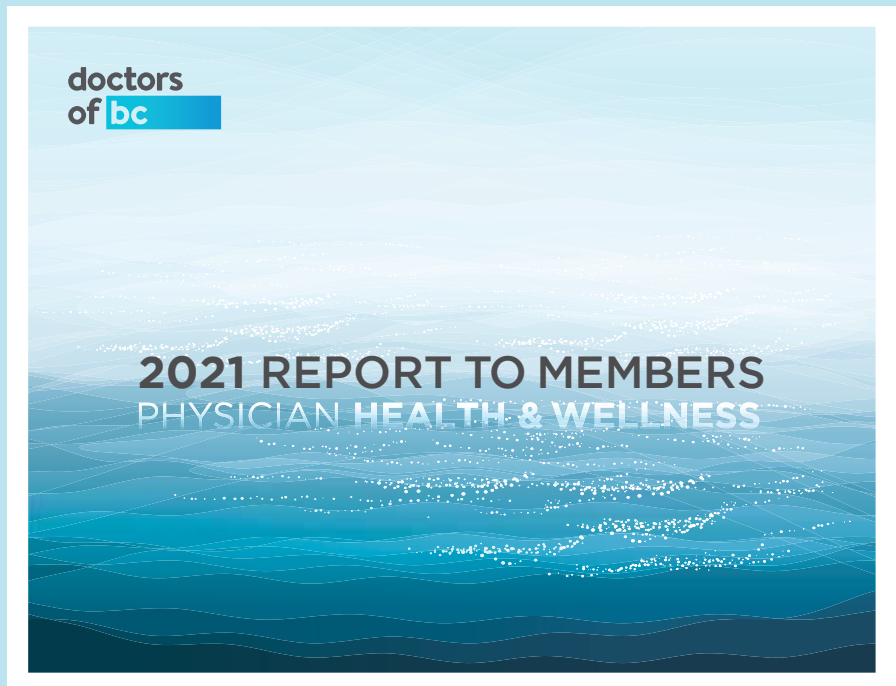
PaRx is Canada's first national, evidence-based nature prescription program, an initiative of the BC Parks Foundation driven by health care professionals. Each prescriber who registers with PaRx receives a nature prescription file customized with a unique provider code, and instructions for how to prescribe and log nature prescriptions. Doctors and other licensed health care professionals in BC can now prescribe Parks Canada Discovery Passes to patients through PaRx. For more information, visit [www.parkprescriptions.ca/en/prescribers](http://www.parkprescriptions.ca/en/prescribers).

## Physician health and wellness: Doctors of BC 2021 Report to Members

Doctors of BC has released its *2021 Report to Members*, with a focus on physician health and wellness. To illustrate some of the ways the association has been working to support physicians throughout the pandemic, the report looks at health and wellness advances made by the Physician Health Program, by the Rural Coordination Centre of BC, and through divisions of family practice, the Joint Collaborative Committees, and the Council on Health Economics and Policy. The report also contains:

- A summary of the year from 2021 President Dr Matthew Chow, Chair of the Board Dr Adam Thompson, Speaker of the Representative Assembly Dr Eric Cadesky, and Acting CEO Mr Jim Aikman.
- Reports from committees, sections, societies, councils, coordinating and working groups, and external committees and affiliated organizations.
- A full list of all the doctors who served on the association's many committees in the year.

The report is available now at [www.doctorsofbc.ca/about-us/report-members](http://www.doctorsofbc.ca/about-us/report-members).



## Free online mental health and substance use supports for your patients

In April 2020, Health Canada launched Wellness Together Canada in response to a rise in mental health and substance use concerns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The free, online platform provides 24/7 access to mental health and substance use supports to all Canadians.

A free companion app (PocketWell) is now available for download to help users better track their mental health status. Additional resources include everything from self-assessment and peer support, to free and confidential sessions with social workers, psychologists, and other professionals. Find out more at [www.wellnesstogether.ca](http://www.wellnesstogether.ca). PocketWell is available from the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store.

