For the love of service, faith, and family: Dr Birinder Narang

Dr Narang stays focused on his patients while also advocating for meaningful, sustainable change to advance primary care for the benefit of a diverse spectrum of communities.

Sujatha Nilavar, MD, CCFP, ABFM

For Dr Birinder Narang, the communities he serves are his greatest reward. While he channels his energy into caring for patients as a Burnaby-based family doctor, he also advocates for improved conditions for the profession and ensuring that all people can access a family doctor—work he will continue as incoming president of BC Family Doctors. Dr Narang is also helping shape the next generation of doctors as a clinical assistant professor in the University of British Columbia Department of Family Practice and Simon Fraser University's Stephens Family School of Medicine. Beyond these roles, Dr Narang looks to his faith and his deep connection to the Sikh community as the foundation of his purpose. The Sikh principle of "oneness," or an energy that connects all people, guides his daily interactions with patients, treating them equally with dignity and compassion.

Dr Nilavar is a physician representative on Doctors of BC's Community Physician Health and Safety Oversight Working Group, a community physician lead for the Physician Quality Improvement initiative in the Fraser Health Authority, a family physician at Azure Medical Clinic, and past co-chair of the Surrey-North Delta Division of Family Practice board of directors.

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Born in the United Kingdom, Dr Narang moved to Halifax at age 6 before eventually settling in British Columbia. Growing up with a psychiatrist father and an occupational therapist mother gave him early exposure to the health care field. While their careers influenced his path, he points to his Sikh upbringing as his main motivation. Sikhi encourages a life of service to the community, and Dr Narang saw family medicine as a route to practising a community-based discipline. He completed medical school in Australia and residency training in Winnipeg, experiences that shaped his understanding of how deeply health care delivery is influenced by local systems. "The real world of medicine," he reflects, "is far more complex than what we learn in training. [It's] something I also impart on my students."

Commitment to service

Dr Narang serves patients across age groups, cultures, and backgrounds, but he is drawn to helping marginalized communities that have barriers to seeking traditional care. In line with his pursuit of a community approach to medicine, he works at the REACH Community Health Centre in East Vancouver. The centre provides community-based health care and emphasizes a collaborative, compassionate, and culturally sensitive approach to patient care.

For Dr Narang, building trust and patience are key to providing compassionate care to all patients. "You learn quickly that trust goes a long way," he says. "It shapes how decisions are made, especially when patients are navigating complex or difficult circumstances." Through his patients, he has developed a deeper understanding of the realities of how people from different backgrounds manage their health.

Collaboration through crisis

Collaboration is another area that fills Dr Narang with pride. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he contributed to the South Asian COVID Task Force, along with several other well-respected Canadian physicians. The purpose was to provide accurate information about the virus and vaccine safety in several South Asian languages to ensure these communities were able to access lifesaving information. This was rewarding work. As Dr Narang remarked, "It was an opportunity to work together to provide myth-busting information in a culturally appropriate way."

In addition, Dr Narang and the task force helped launch a national campaign called "This Is Our Shot" to stamp out vaccine hesitancy across Canada, with the support of several celebrities, including BC's own Ryan Reynolds. The campaign aimed to communicate with diverse audiences, and its campaign slogan T-shirt was translated into 36 languages. It was a successful awareness-building campaign, selling 65 000 T-shirts and amplifying confidence-building information on vaccines. The campaign was a perfect fit for the task force, because it ensured that South Asian communities were included in this important conversation.

Future of family medicine

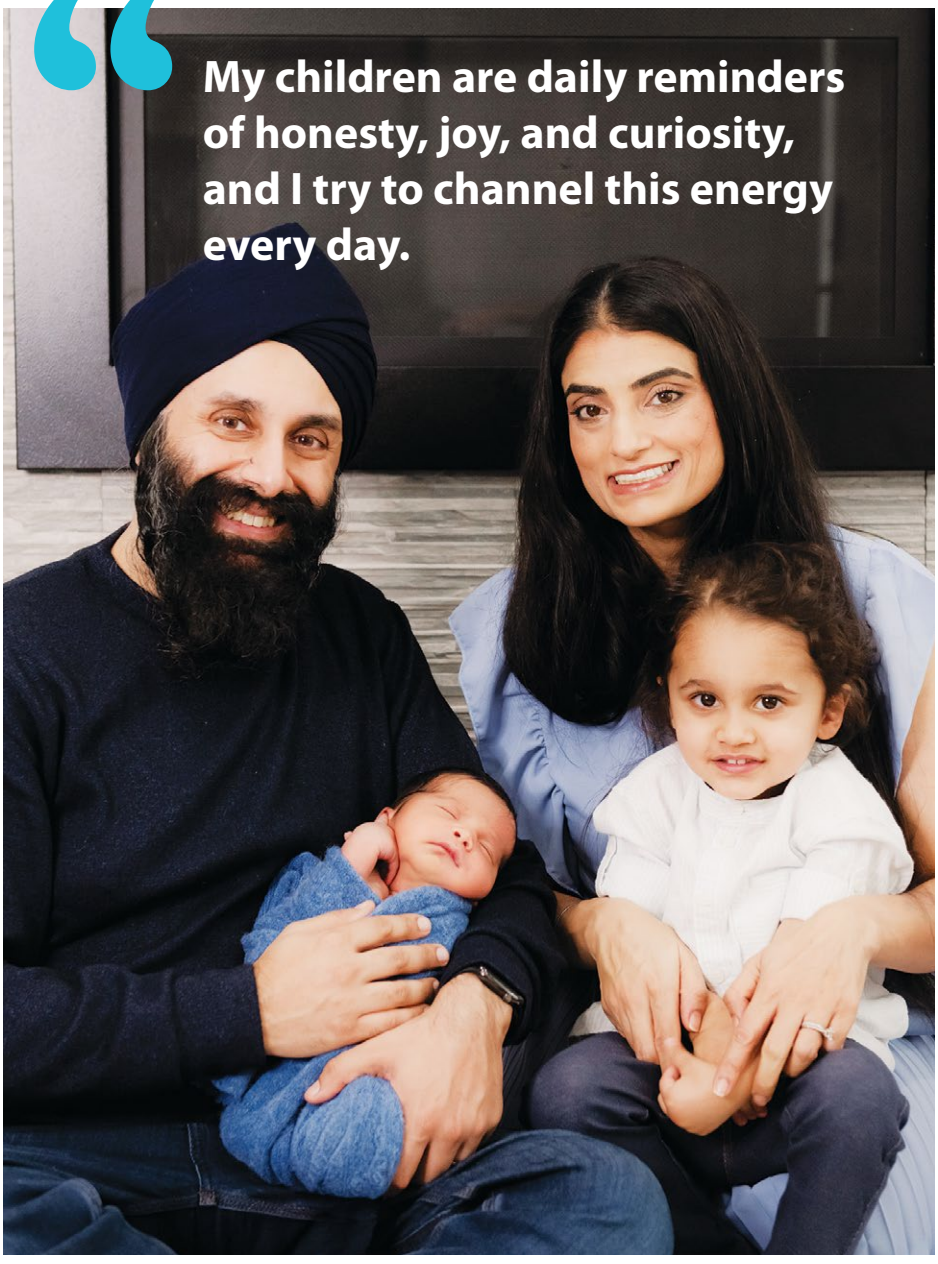
In Dr Narang's opinion, the future of family medicine is bright, most notably because of digital health. Digital health uses technology and digital tools to connect different parts of the health care system. These tools help people manage their health and well-being while enabling clinics and hospitals to share information, coordinate services, and provide better-quality care. As co-chair of Doctors of BC's Joint Executive Table Digital Referrals and Orders program and chair of Doctors of BC's Digital Health Caucus, Dr Narang is helping lead efforts to modernize how health information is digitally captured and exchanged and expand the reach to patients and fellow physicians across British Columbia. As part of this work, he supports improving the governance of electronic medical records in BC to help achieve interoperability. The Digital Referrals and Orders program has a goal of enhancing patient safety and reducing administrative burden for physicians.

The promise of digital health, artificial intelligence–enabled documentation tools, and other technologies designed to reduce administrative burden are all areas anticipated to make a difference in health care delivery. As Dr Narang states, "It's not the technology itself that is exciting but the potential to improve care for both patients and family doctors."

Grounded in faith and family

A key theme in Dr Narang's story is his commitment to faith. His greatest inspiration comes from the examples set by those around him in the Sikh community. Growing up, he was shaped by individuals who showed that it was possible to pursue Western opportunities while remaining rooted in faith, values, and service.

Many of these mentors came through the Sikh Research Institute (SikhRI), a global not-for-profit dedicated to Sikh education and research. Dr Narang's mother played a foundational role in establishing SikhRI in Canada, helping secure its not-for-profit status and serving as chair. Today, Dr Narang continues that connection through his service on SikhRI's Advisory Council, supporting the organization's broader work to make Sikh wisdom, history, and thought more accessible to communities around the world.



Family photo, left to right: Dr Birinder Narang holding Giaan Narang, Dr Jaspreet Mudhar, and Sevak Narang.

In addition to Dr Narang's faith, family is where his heart is. He always looks forward to evenings and weekends when he can be at home with his wife and two children, a toddler and a newborn. "My children are daily reminders of honesty, joy, and curiosity, and I try to channel this energy every day."

Looking ahead

While Dr Narang is always involved in several projects advancing primary care, he is not interested in becoming removed from the realities of care. He plans to stay close to his patients while advocating for meaningful, sustainable change. He intends to continue his community approach to medicine while advocating for improvements that benefit a diverse spectrum of communities. ■