



## Message from SHA Board Chair: Scott Livingstone leaves position as SHA CEO, Interim CEO Andrew Will Announced

The following message is on behalf of Arlene Wiks, Chair, SHA Board of Directors

The Board of Directors has received notice that CEO Scott Livingstone has left his position effective immediately.

The Board is grateful for Scott's leadership during the creation of the SHA and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

As CEO, Scott demonstrated a commitment to patient and family centred care and provided stability during a time of substantial change and significant pressures on the health system due to COVID.

The Board has selected Andrew Will as the Interim CEO.

Born and educated in Saskatchewan, Andrew Will has dedicated his career to providing executive leadership that builds strong organizational culture focused on supporting individuals and teams to achieve their best for the people we serve.

Andrew has served in executive leadership positions for health regions in both Saskatchewan and Alberta, including Chief Executive Officer of four health regions, including as Acting CEO of the former Saskatoon Health Region. He also served as a member of Alberta Health Services executive team in the positions of Executive Vice President of Clinical Support Services. Before joining the Saskatchewan Health Authority, Andrew also served as the Chief Executive Officer of 3sHealth. He is moving to the interim CEO position from his current role as Vice President of Infrastructure, Information and Support for the SHA.

The Board will release updates on the recruitment of a permanent CEO as soon as available. No operations or services have been affected during this time. Our Board is committed to ensuring this transition process ensures operational continuity and stability for our health system.

I am immensely appreciative of the hard work and sacrifice of our health care teams. Please know that we will continue to make every effort to support you through all the challenges that have come during the pandemic.

## **| COVID-19 | Variants of Concern Update**

- The latest numbers of COVID-19 variants of concern cases in Saskatchewan can be viewed on the [Government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of Health website](#). While all of the variants have cause for concern, the one currently making headlines right now is the Omicron variant (B.1.1.529).
- The Omicron variant was recently detected in South Africa and has a large number of mutations, which is raising additional concern for its potentially higher transmissibility rate and the potential for immune escape.
  - Immune escape means that some variants may be able to partially avoid the immune response that is produced after vaccination or infection with a different variant.



- Anyone who is unvaccinated is at a significantly higher risk of getting COVID and the likelihood of potential further spread of the Omicron variant at the global level is high.
- None of the B.1.1.529 mutations affect any of the diagnostic assays (i.e. PCR or nucleic acid detection tests or Antigen point-of-care tests) in use in Saskatchewan. An individual who has this variant will be positive on all routine SARS-CoV-2 diagnostic tests.
- All specimens from international travelers that test positive for SARS-CoV-2 in Saskatchewan undergo whole genome sequencing (WGS) to determine their lineage.
- As of Nov. 26, the World Health Organization designated the Omicron (B 1.1.529) variant as a Variant of Concern. So far, there are no Omicron (B 1.1.529) variants in Saskatchewan yet although Ontario, Alberta, B.C. and Quebec have reported confirmed Omicron cases.

### What is a Variant of Concern (VOC)?

A variant for which there is evidence of an increase in transmissibility, more severe disease (increased hospitalizations or deaths), significant reduction in neutralizations by antibodies generated during previous infection or vaccination, reduced effectiveness of treatments or vaccines, or diagnostic detection failures.

### What is a Variant of Interest (VOI)?

A variant that has specific genetic markers that have been associated with changes to receptor binding, reduced neutralization by antibodies generated against previous infection or vaccination, reduced efficacy of treatments, potential diagnostic impact, or predicted increase in transmissibility or disease severity.

### Do we need a vaccine booster?

The most important thing anyone can do to protect themselves against COVID-19 or any of the variants, is to get fully vaccinated. More evidence is needed before we can know if any guidance on immunization programs should change in light of this variant. If you are unvaccinated or only partially vaccinated, complete your vaccination series to protect yourself and those you care about.

### Remain vigilant and remember:

- The Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Health Authority continues to monitor ALL variants very closely and report them as they are discovered.
- Getting vaccinated and completing your vaccination series is the best protection against COVID-19 and its variants.
- With the winter holidays approaching and as more Saskatchewan residents receive the COVID-19 vaccine, it's tempting to relax or ease up on your personal COVID-19 safety precautions. Please don't do that. Continue to keep your guard up, for your safety, the safety of those you love and the safety of the people we serve and care for every day. Vaccination, along with non-pharmacological interventions continue to be effective in controlling spread of all COVID variants:
  - Continue masking while at work and while out in public.



- Perform regular hand hygiene and respect physical distancing.
- Do not come to work if you have even mild symptoms.
- Get tested regularly to protect yourself and those around you.

## **| COVID-19 | There is still time to be immunized before the holidays**

For those who remain unvaccinated there's still time to get fully immunized in time for the holidays, and make sure all you're spreading to friends and family this year is holiday cheer.

Single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccines are still available at a number of walk-in vaccine clinics, including Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Lloydminster, and Estevan.

You are considered fully immunized 14 days after completing your immunization. Visit the [SHA website](#) for the most up-to-date list of vaccine availability, clinic times and locations.

## **| COVID-19 | Grade 7 Students Helps Friends Overcome Fear of Needles**

Nuha Patel didn't intend to become a moral support for her needle-averse friends, but who better to reassure them about getting their COVID-19 vaccinations than someone who has faced that fear head on?

"It was completely accidental," said the 12-year-old from Saskatoon. "I was telling a friend that I had been really nervous to get my vaccine and telling that whole dramatic tale – just like a joke."

Turns out, her friend had an appointment to get vaccinated and she was scared.

"I remember telling her that, 'It's okay. It will be fine. It will hurt but, when you look back at it, it's something you have to do because you have to make sure everyone around you is safe.'"

Since that time, Patel has helped calm the frayed nerves of at least a half dozen friends and classmates.

"I think they were mostly worried about the what-ifs. What if it really hurts? What if something happens? I told them they should focus on the pros instead of the cons," she said.

Patel, who is the oldest in her friend group, had already talked herself through these same concerns. She was immunized on the first day the vaccine was available to her age group.

"I love school, I love seeing all my friends, and I really, really wanted to get my vaccine and get it over with. I wanted it so I could feel more protected and, if other people got it, then schools would not shut down," she said.

That doesn't mean getting vaccinated was easy.



“I remember thinking to myself if I close my eyes and talk I won’t feel anything but I was so focused on not feeling anything that I felt everything,” she said. “It hurt a little but as I was getting it I remember thinking of all the things I could do now.”

Patel said she has been anxious about getting needles as long as she can remember.

"I am terribly afraid of getting needles. I think that they are one of the scariest things ever. I’m not a big fan of needles.”

She said several of her friends feel the same way so she had little difficulty putting herself in their shoes to help defuse their concerns.

For the most part, she said, her friends have appreciated her advice.

“Of course, I couldn’t stop it (the needle) from hurting but I could help them calm down and to take a deep breath about the situation. I think I did remind them that it’s important that you do this one thing so that so many other things don’t happen to the people you love.”

Patel said while it makes her feel good to help others, ultimately, she feels getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is a responsibility.

“It made me think that if we all do a little part in ending COVID, then the world would be much better off. Getting vaccinated is something we should all at least consider because we don’t want this to happen again.”



### **| COVID-19 | Vaccinating my kids with a little black Magic**

By David Freeman, Communications Consultant, Saskatchewan Health Authority

Vaccinations are not new to our family. Our twins have undergone a number of childhood and flu vaccinations – with more to come.

But we’ve never looked forward to them, either. As babies, they cried and squirmed as expected. Once a public health nurse received a death stare from one twin after she saw her brother get jabbed and it made him cry. As the twins aged, they began reacting differently, not to the vaccine itself, but to the thought of the vaccine and specifically, the needle.

This is not uncommon, no matter how old you are, but most kids (and adults) find a way to grit their teeth and bear it. Sometimes a tear, or 10, are shed. But not for my little girl, who began responding to the thought of a needle as if she were a wild child raised by wolves. We’ve been asked to leave a vaccination appointment more than once due to her frightfully fierce flailing at the mere thought and sight of a needle.



But in our house, not getting vaccinated is not an option. Vaccinations are super important. Both my wife and I had to suffer through chicken pox as children. Our kids will not. That is the power of vaccines.



Early in the pandemic, when vaccines for COVID-19 were still being developed, we talked to our twins about the importance of getting vaccinated. We told them how vaccines would help keep them from getting really sick and how they make more social interactions – like play dates, family visits and sports – safe. It often made them a little fearful and anxious, particularly my daughter, but it also laid the groundwork for when it was their turn.

This week, it was their turn. And the reaction was surprising. A fist pump and jumping around from one

twin; a fearful gasp, deep breath and an “I can do this” from the other.

Arriving at the clinic, there were smiles at first, but fear quickly closed in on us as we got closer to where the needles were – it was like Death Eaters coming for Sirius Black in the Harry Potter books. Like the popular wizard, we’d need strong magic and nearly-unwavering bravery to get to the other side. I was convinced this wouldn’t be a good day, but boy, I was wrong.

Our nurse, Shelley, was amazing. She saw the fear in their eyes and addressed it head-on. Making eye contact. Addressing them calmly, sweetly and caringly. Taking both of their hands in hers, she immediately tried to distract them and draw their own bravery from within.

Next, we needed a little black magic. On this day, it came in the form of a black lab therapy dog named Magic who helped save the day.

Fear melted away to smiles. They loved her and she loved them back. From there, love, happiness and tail wags helped them to find their bravery. And, before my daughter could answer that pink is her favourite colour, it was done.

My little girl was right, she could do this. It was a magical day for this proud dad. Thank you Magic.

One shot down, one to go.



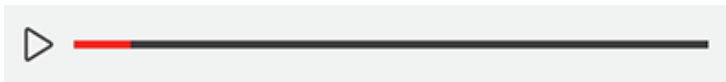
*Twins getting to know therapy dog Magic before receiving their COVID-19 vaccine.*



### **| COVID-19 | Kids talk to Docs**

Children from across Saskatchewan submitted COVID-19 vaccination questions – and our physicians answered!

This question comes from Luke in Saskatoon and he asks will the COVID shot hurt?



This question comes from Peter and Rose in Saskatoon and they ask how is the flu shot different from the COVID-19 shot?



This question comes from Hadley in Rosetown – after I get my COVID-19 vaccine, what can I do to not get sick?



### **| COVID-19 | COVID – Far Worse than Any Vaccine Side Effect**

Is COVID a serious health threat? Is it more dangerous to get COVID than to get a vaccine? Does personal freedom come hand-in-hand with personal responsibility?

Yes, to all of it, says Dr. John Froh of the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Dr. Froh is the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Pandemic, and has been working with the Saskatchewan Health Authority’s Emergency Operations Centre for the past 18 months. He is also an Emergency Room physician, a trauma attending physician and a STARS physician.

He’s heard a lot about COVID-19 over the course of the pandemic, has treated it in patients, and has seen how the vaccine distribution among the population has helped. He’s previously reported, in a [Faces of the Fight story](#), that he fears for the safety of the unvaccinated during this fourth wave of the Delta COVID-19 variant.

Angus Reid recently came out with poll results that stated the eight per cent of the Canadian population who still refuse to be vaccinated cite health concerns, personal freedoms, and that COVID-19 is not a serious health threat as their reasons for refusing the vaccine.

Froh, and many others who work within the health system, refute all three.

“In terms of health concerns, COVID-19 is an enormous threat compared to the possible side effects of any COVID-19 vaccine,” Froh noted. “The common side effects of the vaccine are fever, fatigue, headache and pain at the injection site.



What happens when you contract COVID-19 as an unvaccinated person is a roll of the dice. You could lose your sense of smell for a couple of weeks, or you could end up needing a ventilator. Or you could die. Those are all very real possible outcomes, the latter especially if you are unvaccinated and contract the Delta variant, which is nearly as contagious as measles, the most contagious disease out there. It's so much safer just to get the vaccine."

Young, old, physically fit, obese – COVID doesn't seem to care. Not enough is known about it yet – it's too new – for anyone to know the exact things that put someone at risk for developing a severe form of the disease. So if you think you could survive a bout of it, and because of that refuse a vaccine, you are literally gambling with your life. Because no one – not even the world's foremost researchers – could tell you if you'll live or die from it. Only COVID knows that, and it's not telling.

As for the vaccines, they were available quickly, yes, but research into these types of vaccines has been ongoing for years. And they've passed all the rigorous tests set out by Health Canada, as well as their careful review process. Only vaccines that are proven to be safe, effective and of high quality are authorized for use in Canada. They can't give you COVID-19 because they don't contain the virus that causes it, and they can't change your DNA.

There have been some allergic and some other rare reactions to the vaccines, both the mRNA versions and the viral vectors.

"It's not unusual at all to have rare reactions reported to any vaccine," Froh explained. "And there have been some to the COVID-19 vaccines available in Canada. However, these vaccines have now been injected into billions of people, so the chances of you having one of these reactions is, as it is stated, extremely rare."

And yes, it is still your choice to get a vaccine. But with personal freedom comes responsibilities. You refusing to get a vaccine could not only harm yourself if you contract COVID, you could ensure it spreads to others who get sick and/or die, or be responsible for yet another mutation of the virus.

"We're all in this together," Froh said. "This is a global health crisis. Getting a vaccine is not about someone seeking to control you and your actions. It's about seeking to stamp out this virus. Because the virus can live in all of us and be spread by all of us, we are all responsible for its eradication. Every living person is responsible for this. And the more we delay vaccination, the more chances the virus has to live on, to mutate, and to kill or harm more of us."

The reported death toll from COVID-19 has now reached five million worldwide.

"The vaccine is not about controlling the population, it's about controlling the virus, and its spread," Froh noted. "The sooner we accept that, as humans, it's the virus we are fighting, not our governments, not our doctors or nurses, not





each other, the sooner we will win. Vaccination is the way to win that fight. It's a way for us to stand together against COVID.

"And it's the only way out of this."

## **| COVID-19 | Confirmation Bias – seeking out similar views to confirm pre-existing belief**

Confirmation bias is the tendency to seek out, interpret, judge and remember information that supports one's pre-existing views and ideas.

We may believe we are seeing a lot of different opinions from a lot of different people when we log onto our social media accounts. However, social media channels and search engines run on algorithms designed to learn what you like and show you more of that same thing. Did you like that one cat video? Here are 800 more cat videos. Did you read that post from someone opposed to vaccination? Here are thousands of more posts with a similar messages.

**Confirmation bias** occurs because our brains are prone to take in and keep information that upholds beliefs we already hold, and tend to ignore information that challenges those beliefs.

Social media can feed confirmation bias because its algorithms are filtering out potential alternate points of view or information based on your likes and the likes of your social connections. You are more likely to believe that your opinions on sports teams, vacation destinations and vaccines are correct and shared by the majority because the social media platform is designed to present your preferences back to you again and again.

This is how people get entrenched in a point of view and vulnerable to misinformation.

"The vast majority of doctors and leaders are saying that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective, and still people aren't trusting that information. Part of the reason is the misinformation that's out there," said Dr. Kevin Wasko, Saskatchewan Health Authority Physician Executive, Integrated Rural Health. Wasko is an active participant on social media, and comes up against people who believe wholeheartedly in the COVID-19 and vaccination misinformation being shared daily.

"If you're worried about getting the COVID-19 vaccine and go to social media for information, it's likely that worry is going to be reinforced by some of the content out there that's not from reliable sources," he said.

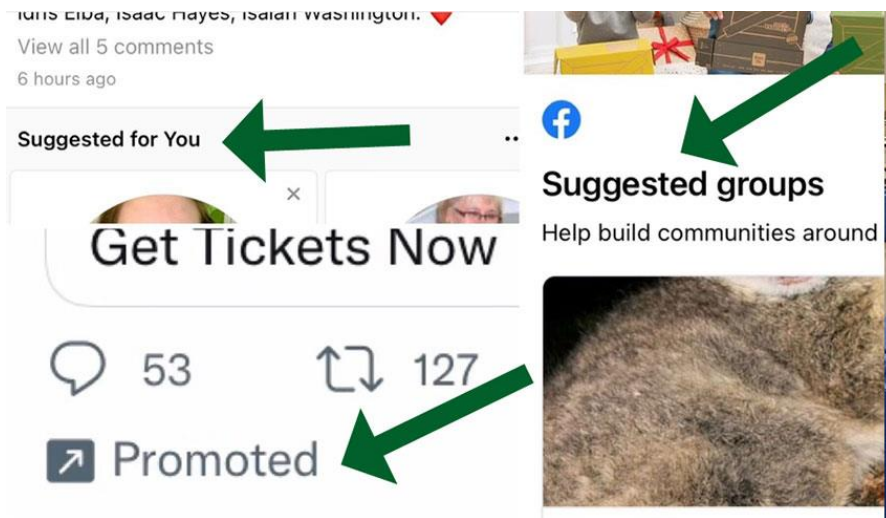
To combat confirmation bias, Wasko advises people seek information from reliable sources – reputable news outlets, [Saskatchewan Health Authority](#), [Public Health Agency of Canada](#), [World Health Organization](#), etc. When you are told to reject what reliable organizations are saying, ask yourself who would benefit from you believing their claims over what experts are advising.

"Form your opinions based on facts from reputable sources," said Wasko. "It's important to think for yourself, but it's also important that we believe what the actual experts are saying based on the knowledge they have gained through years of study. I, like my physician colleagues, studied for years to gain the knowledge I have in medicine, health and the





human body, and have been working in this field for many years. You trust us with your broken bones, your baby’s fever and Grandma’s high blood pressure. Please trust us on the safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines. We are here to answer your health questions and help you make an informed decision.”



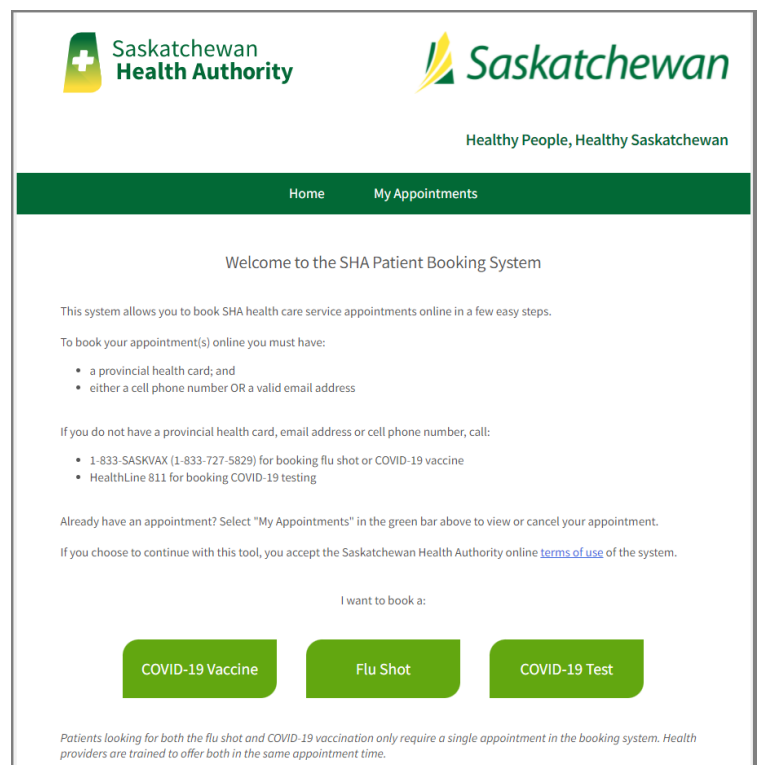
“Sponsored”, “Promoted” and “Suggested” are all ways social media uses algorithms to show you similar content to what you’ve already looked at. This can reinforce your bias by only showing similar viewpoints so you never see the other side of conversations/discussions/arguments.

### **COVID-19** | Book your COVID Test Online

Since its introduction, the Saskatchewan Health Authority [Patient Booking System](#) has been used to book COVID-19 vaccine and influenza immunizations, and as of Nov. 30, 2021, anyone can use it to book a COVID-19 test online. Online booking is available for testing sites across the province.

Anyone who is experiencing symptoms of COVID or who has been informed that they may have been exposed to COVID should be tested as soon as possible. Booking online makes it possible to see all the dates and times that may work for you if drive-thru or walk-in testing is not an option for you.

The Patient Booking System provides a step by step, easy to follow process for booking a COVID test online for yourself and your family. A health card number and a valid email address or cell phone number will be required to book online. There are videos available to watch that takes a user





through the process step by step of an [individual](#) or [group](#) booking. More information about when you should get tested is available on the [province's COVID-19 testing website](#).

Anyone who does not have a health card or who needs help booking a COVID test can still call HealthLine 811 for assistance.

If you require proof of a negative test before you travel or before attending an event, access user-pay COVID-19 asymptomatic testing through a private lab. A list of user-pay labs can be found here on the [province's COVID-19 website](#).

### Dr. John Froh receives Dr. Dennis A. Kendel Distinguished Service Award for 2021

During a meeting of the Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan (CPSS) held on Nov. 19, 2021, Council confirmed the selection by the Nomination Committee of this year's recipient of the prestigious Dr. Dennis A. Kendel Distinguished Service Award for outstanding contributions to physician leadership and to physician engagement in quality improvements in health care in Saskatchewan.

Council is pleased to announce that the 2021 edition of this prestigious prize has been awarded to Dr. John Froh, who is currently serving in many medical roles, including full spectrum emergency and trauma care since 2002 as Attending Emergency Physician, Department of Emergency Medicine, and since 2018 as Attending Trauma Service Physician, Department of Surgery with the Saskatchewan Health Authority in Saskatoon, Medical Director and Transport Physician for STARS (Shock Trauma Air Rescue Service) since 2013.

Since early 2020, he has also been Deputy Chief Medical Officer Pandemic, has been providing senior physician leadership through the Saskatchewan Health Authority to manage COVID-19 in the province of Saskatchewan as well.

“Dr. Froh is a great physician leader and an asset to the profession of medicine in Canada. He has demonstrated excellence in his field, including most recently in the pandemic response to COVID-19 in the province of Saskatchewan,” stated Dr. Olawale Franklin Igbekoyi, President of the Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan.

“Throughout this pandemic, so many physicians and allied health-care workers have stood up and helped out. Nothing achieved was due to a single individual's efforts, but rather has been the result of the efforts of the team, our health-care community, caring for our province. I am honoured to have this recognition bestowed upon me by my peers and share this award with all of my dedicated colleagues who have tirelessly worked to deal with this once in a lifetime crisis.” said Dr. Froh.

Dr. Froh's interests in Trauma Care, Disaster Medicine and Transport Medicine have led him to contribute considerably to the development and ongoing updating of pre-hospital critical care medical control protocols in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta as well as the STARS air ambulance program.



Froh has also contributed to the development of a community outreach education program, the Mobile Education Unit, for providing critical care, trauma and mass casualty education and preparation to rural and regional health-care teams. Dr. Froh also spent many years mentoring, training and educating students, clerks and residents from the colleges of Medicine, Nursing and Dentistry.


Due to the pandemic situation, the traditional award dinner and official ceremony has been postponed to an undetermined date. In the meantime, please join us in congratulating Dr. Froh for this accomplishment.

Read more detail, including Dr. Froh’s biography, on the [College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan website](https://www.cpsa.ca/COVID19).

**COVID-19**

***In their own words...***

[saskatchewan.ca/COVID19](https://www.saskatchewan.ca/COVID19)



“The vaccine is not about controlling the population, it’s about controlling the virus, and its spread. The sooner we accept that it’s the virus we are fighting, not our governments, not our doctors or nurses, not each other, the sooner we will win. Vaccination is the way to win.” Dr. John Froh

### Prince Albert Doctor Named Physician of the Year

The Saskatchewan Medical Association (SMA) has named Prince Albert family physician Dr. Breanna Davis the 2021 Physician of the Year.

“It’s an incredible honour, especially this year,” said Dr. Davis. “It’s been a trying year for everybody and there are so many people working very hard. I don’t know if I’ve ever seen this level of teamwork and commitment in my 12 years of practice. I’m very honoured but I also wish I could share it with everyone out there.”

According to one physician who nominated Dr. Davis for the award, Davis “genuinely cares about the lives of her patients. I saw her laugh with them, cry with them, and simply be what they needed... I would be proud to be a family physician who is half as amazing as she someday.”

Dr. Davis’s medical practice is located at the Associate Medical Clinic in Prince Albert (P.A.). She also holds remote clinics every two weeks in Sturgeon Lake. She commutes to her practice daily from Melfort, where she moved after marrying in 2014.

As lead for the COVID-19 Assessment Centre and hospitalists, Dr. Davis co-ordinates physicians in both programs, which were established in P.A. in response to the pandemic. She also does obstetrics and has been continuously involved in teaching and precepting medical students and residents.



“There a lot of things that fill my cup and part of that is having variety and making connections in multiple locations,” Davis said of her various roles.

Davis enjoys family medicine because it allows her to work with a wide cross-section of patients and populations. “But more so than that,” she said, “it’s something that can be done at the community level, which allows you to grasp all the elements that impact people’s health.”

Dr. Davis, a graduate of the University of Saskatchewan’s

College of Medicine, said she chose family medicine, in part, because of her training experiences as a student. These included working in underserved communities in northern Saskatchewan.

“That experience helped lay the framework for my connection to the community, and to the North, which I wanted to continue,” she said.

Dr. Davis said she’s kept celebrations marking her achievement low key.

“The night I found out I kissed my kids and poured myself a glass of wine while I cooked supper. You can’t get more COVID-friendly than that!”

### **| COVID-19 | QUICK LINKS:**

[Public Health Orders  
Testing Information](#)

[Vaccine Update  
SHA News Stories](#)