



President's message: First-winter woes

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The seasons are changing, and a new group of rural doctors are facing their first winter in practice. With this in mind, I offer tips from some SRPC members for a healthy season in the Great White North.

I seldom considered transportation prior to moving to rural BC. However, the choice of vehicle is important. Many of us provide on-call from home, which results in the inevitable after-midnight trip to the hospital. I found out they plow the roads infrequently at

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IF POSSIBLE. IF NOT,
GET A FRONT-WHEEL DRIVE
WITH GOOD SNOW TIRES.**

night. Unless you are on a major highway they may not plow your road for days. Get a 4-wheel drive if possible. If not, get a front-wheel drive with good snow tires. I spent too much time on call either stuck in my driveway, worrying about getting stuck in my driveway, or not going home because I knew I would get stuck in the driveway. And if you don't know what a block heater is, find out. You'll need one.

Another practical consideration is where you live, what type of house, how it is heated, and where your water supply comes from. Rural acreage is tremendously appealing, but can add to transportation challenges. Likewise, log houses are very popular. But nobody tells you about how difficult they are to

insulate. The logs shrink, and wind whistling through the cracks can make a rural winter extremely unpleasant. If you choose wood heat, you either have to participate in the annual woodcutting ritual or buy the stuff. You also must stoke the fire at odd hours. As for water, one of my colleagues misses a considerable amount of work each winter when he is out in his yard with a blowtorch thawing out his frozen pipes. A good reliable well with properly buried pipes is an absolute necessity.

A more serious challenge has to do with living in a small town for the winter. It is harder to go away because the roads are bad. The days are short, and the nights are long. No matter where you go, you see your patients everywhere. It is a challenge to establish proper boundaries between your personal and professional life. If you cannot define your own space the job will consume you. Something that helps a great deal in these situations is the support of your more experienced colleagues. In addition to the local medical community I have found the larger community of rural docs in the SRPC to be tremendously helpful. The contacts at meetings and CME events, the practical articles and personal stories shared in the *CJRM*, and the advice on RuralMed have all been useful.

We are in the midst of a membership drive. To be effective and continue to provide support to rural doctors on a variety of levels, we need your help. If you're not a member, consider joining. If you're already a member I hope you find the collegiality many of us experience through the SRPC to be a valuable addition to your medical life.