

Rural and Remote 2020

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A few 1000 years ago, in subjective time, rural doctors were letting patients come to their offices, sit in the waiting room, and then were seen face to face. Even in this before time, it was clear that things were changing.

On 12th March, Canada had 117 cases of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), and projections internal to the society were that the Canadian epidemic would peak in 6 weeks at the end of April, just about the time we would be running our annual conference. The SRPC executive met that day and made the painful decision to cancel rural and remote 2020 in Ottawa.

Life accelerated from there. Our office set up a respiratory clinic away from our regular patients. On 18th March, like many of you, it came home to me as I swabbed my first positive COVID patient. Yes, they were young and healthy enough, but they had vulnerable friends and family in the community... in our community. Our local planning accelerated, aided and abetted by the SRPC E-mail list.

The RuralMED listserv grew feral and exploded (what? a 50-post limit!?), we soon learned more about epidemiology, mask design, protected codes, and competing theories about how to best manage COVID patients than I thought possible. Rural health

moved and adjusted quickly, just as the rest of society did. A course cancellation seems a minor thing in the context of all that has happened and is happening, and yet... and yet rural and remote is missed.

While for some rural and remote is admittedly just a conference, for many, many others, it's much more, and it's a homecoming. It's where we rural doctors connect. We learn about what's new, but we are also inspired by what is possible and what could and should be done. We join in a community that is understanding and supportive that celebrates our art and its practitioners. It's where we meet our mentors, colleagues and friends.

To all the people I meet at rural and remote and your families, stay safe. I look forward to seeing you at the rural and remote conference on 22nd-24th April, 2021, in Niagara Falls, Ontario. I anticipate discussions on how the prospects of national licensure have or have not improved. I look forward to learning about how people managed through all this. However, in a way, I most look forward to impassioned debates on trivial matters such as: Is the East or the West going to win the annual hockey rural and remote hockey game? It's pointless to argue it here. Such weighty discussions can be best held in that safe yearly gathering of our rural family - when we meet again.

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