

# Spotlight on Advisors

*Article written by the Strategic Clinical Network™ (SCN) Patient and Family Engagement team*

Patient and family engagement has always been a priority of the SCNs. From the inception of the SCNs in 2012, the involvement of patient and family advisors (advisors) has been part of the SCNs' approach to engagement. Advisors serve in many ways across Alberta Health Services (AHS) and play a unique role in helping AHS improve the quality and safety of health services in the province. We believe that advisors provide perspectives that lead to better patient care.

Recruited to each individual SCN based on their specific health care experiences and their passion to make positive change, advisors are committed to sharing their knowledge, perspectives and time as part of their SCN work.

There are currently about 145 advisors who have been volunteering their time and efforts in support of the SCNs in order to improve Alberta's healthcare system. The sheer selflessness of our advisors peaked our interest in learning more about their motivation to be involved with the SCNs; so we interviewed a few of our long-standing advisors who shared their unique perspective on working with the SCNs.

Winnie Pearson says she feels the love of doing, helping, and giving beyond herself gives her great joy and a focus. "Initially, I felt like a bump on a log. It was seeming that "they" were just honoring the system's requests to have a patient visible at the table. Now, years later, if advisors are not at the table, we need to go and find an advisor."

The capacity and compassion of our advisors, some of whom go through difficult health situations, to carve out time to uplift others continues to amaze us.

While each advisor had a different reason for getting involved, at the heart of their passion for volunteering was their common desire to give back. According to our advisors, patience, relationship building and trust are key ingredients to keeping them engaged.

For Lorelee Marin, she remembers a moment about twenty years ago that ignited her passion towards being a voice for patients and her motivation to volunteer with the SCNs. "In March 1999, my husband and I were sitting in an oncologist's office as the Oncologist told my husband he had cancer with a 25% chance of survival. We are so grateful for the outstanding care he received and committed ourselves to giving back."



The trusting relationships developed and the confidence of the SCNs in advisors to inform SCN work creates the rich experiences that keep our advisors volunteering. Developing a sense of belonging goes beyond providing the space to exchange ideas; it is ensuring that advisors feel accepted and supported in contributing to the discussion.

Mike Simoens feels the interaction with advisors, patients and providers is what he finds makes volunteering enjoyable. “Seeing the reaction of medical professionals with decades and decades of experience, hear a story and then just beam at something they didn’t know is so rewarding.”

Mike first got involved as a PaCER (Patient and Community Engagement Researcher). His colleague told him about the SCN patient and family advisor volunteer opportunity and he thought it would be a great way to get involved and to give back.

Though the road has been winding and there have been changes in how we engage, our SCN advisors continue to forge alongside us towards a new path forward.

The shared goal of finding innovative ways to deliver care and provide better outcomes and value for Albertans is the thread that binds us together. This thirst for excellence helps establish meaningful and effective advisor engagement.

If you wish to improve engagement with your advisors, **connection is key**. Get to know your advisors, learn about their stories, and understand the skills and time they have to invest. And, most importantly, value their contribution and welcome them as a cherished member of your team.

Thanks to all our wonderful advisors, including Winnie, Lorelee and Mike who happily support the SCNs with their time, knowledge and experiences.



Winnie Pearson



Lorelee Marin



Mike Simoens