

RE: Pediatrician leaving Fort McMurray in protest of on-call system (Fort McMurray Today, January 5, 2017).

As a pediatrician in Fort McMurray, a city I have long called home, my very first priority is to my patients and their families. As a mom, my first priority is to the health and wellbeing of my family - I fully understand the worry we experience as parents if we feel our families may not be well cared for.

If my patients, or anyone in Fort McMurray, were at risk due to a practice or policy in place at our hospital, I would be the first person to stand up and speak out. I know my colleagues would not hesitate to do the same.

I was disappointed to hear that my colleague, Dr. Al-Naami, is leaving the community, and I wish him well in his future endeavours.

However, I feel it is important to provide some reassurance to those impacted by Dr. Al-Naami's departure.

Firstly, Fort McMurray has an excellent team of pediatricians who work tirelessly for our patients and families.

I do not agree with Dr. Al-Naami's opinion regarding the on-call system for pediatricians at Northern Lights Regional Health Centre.

This system is safe, and ensures that a pediatrician is available and ready to provide care to any child who needs it, in a timely and effective manner. At any time – day, night or weekend – one of us is on-call and available.

While that does mean some disruption to our community practices, that is something we are prepared to do, and something we agreed to do when we came to Fort McMurray. It is an obligation we made to our community.

During our on-call week, we must balance the needs of our own patients, while ensuring we have the ability to provide care at the hospital if and when we are needed. This is something my colleagues and I have done for years without concern or complaint.

When I am on-call, I know that I may need to be at the hospital immediately. And, if a call comes, I also know that the patient is in the wonderful hands of my emergency department colleagues until I arrive at the hospital. I know this system is in place for my family & for all families in our community.

It is always a team effort, with one goal in mind – the safe and timely care of our patients.

I do understand the concerns of parents worried about what the departure of Dr. Al-Naami will mean for their families and for our city. While the city is well-served by those already practicing here, more pediatricians in Fort McMurray would be of benefit.

I am reassured by the fact that AHS is recruiting for more pediatricians – a recruitment process that was underway before Dr. Al-Naami decided to leave. In fact, we had a pediatrician who wanted to come to Fort McMurray last spring, but she decided against it after the devastating wildfire we faced.

I am happy to share that at present we have two new pediatricians interested in our community. Given that they'd be coming from outside Canada, we're fortunate to have an experienced AHS physician

recruitment team to assist with the complex process. Additionally next week, we're interviewing a child psychiatrist who's interested in Fort McMurray.

I would be remiss if I did not point out that physician recruitment to northern communities is challenging. The vast majority of us as physicians are independent contractors running private businesses - once we have a license to practice medicine in Alberta, we have the freedom to work where we choose.

Some physicians don't recognize how fortunate we are to practice in Fort McMurray - I love raising my family here and I love working here. Our AHS physician recruitment team works like Fort McMurray healthcare providers do – around the clock to share what our community has to offer and to bring these physicians to our medical community.

I am constantly impressed with the work of my colleagues, who continually provide the very best care to our patients. I know my kids and my family are safe and well cared for.

I am confident this will continue.

Dr. Vida Kazembe

Fort McMurray Pediatrician