

Dr. Ronald Barton

Dr. Barton moved to Canada in 1979 after working as a physician in the UK for over seven years. He worked in Bashaw then Jasper, Alberta each for four years before settling in Edmonton. He worked as a GP and admits that he was surprised by the very few physicians doing house calls. He gradually got the reputation of being willing to go see Geriatric patients and eventually terminally ill patients at home. He did this on top of a busy general practice and eventually it became difficult for him to maintain an office.

For the last ten years, Dr. Barton has focused purely on community palliative care, seeing terminally ill patients at home or in hospice on a full-time basis. While he claims to be “getting a bit old and less energetic”, he continues to work five to six days per week as the only full-time physician in the Edmonton area offering palliative care services in the home. He works as an independent GP, receiving referrals from Palliative Care Physicians, physicians at the Cross Cancer Institute or from Palliative Care home care nurses. He is said to be an indispensable member of Edmonton’s palliative care community and to have “voluntarily shouldered a disproportionate burden of palliative care for patients at home for many years.”



Dr. Barton, his son, son in law and grand-daughter

Dr. Barton feels strongly that there is a real need for quality home palliative care. He has learned that this *is* possible, with dedicated teams trained in the needs of palliative care patients and of course, a supportive, committed family. He feels that family physicians, especially with an aging population, should be more willing to play a large role in the care of their elderly and palliative care patients and should be offering them home visits.

What Dr. Barton loves most about the work that he does is the satisfaction that he has in making a difference in the comfort of his patients, a certain satisfaction that he feels was not present in general practice. “I suppose I see a need there and I see myself making a difference when we’re no longer able

to influence the course of the disease.” Dr. Barton feels his biggest accomplishment to be his involvement in teams working to facilitate domiciliary palliative care and helping patients remain home as long as possible. His colleagues concur and speak of his utmost dedication and willingness to advocate for his patients and to go the extra mile to help them remain at home at end of life. A colleague says that Dr. Barton “has never counted the hours spent seeing his patients and still never does.”

When asked how he spends his spare time, Dr. Barton nonchalantly yet humorously claims he does “nothing exotic like golfing or bungee jumping.” He does enjoy spending time with his grandchildren and enjoys reading “blood and guts crime stories” by the likes of James Patterson. He also likes gardening and woodworking – a hobby he has enjoyed since a young age. He claims that if he hadn’t become a doctor, he would have been a carpenter. Ron has faced death more personally, about seven years ago, when he lost his wife and also sixteen years ago when a dissected thoracic aortic aneurysm forced him to undergo surgery with a 30% chance of demise. He thanks superb physicians and surgeons and his supportive family for helping him through that difficult time.



Dr. Barton with one of his grand-daughters

Dr. Barton mentions Dr. Eduardo Bruera as someone who has made a “great deal of impression” on him. He looks up to his many palliative care physician colleagues for whom he has a lot of respect. He is certainly in turn, well respected by his colleagues who have nominated him as a local palliative care hero and who recognize him as a champion, a pioneer and a leader of palliative care. “I have a sense of awe to his commitment to his profession, his dignified and genuine approach to his patients” said one of his coworkers.

As Dr. Barton approaches retirement age, I am brought to wonder who will take on the monumental role he has played in the Edmonton area once he does retire. This friendly, might I say jolly man has clearly touched the lives of many patients and families and has many times over given them the gift of a home death which is truly the most wonderful gift a dying person can receive.

Dr. Saneea Abboud