

Dr. Aimee Kernick

Dr. Aimee Kernick is a rural emergency physician (CCFP-EM), originally from Canmore, Alberta, who practices throughout rural British Columbia and Northwest Territories. She is the current chair of the CAEP Rural and Small Urban Section, 2021 CAEP Conference Lead for the Rural Track, and has been previously featured by the Women of Emergency Medicine. She completed her medical degree at the University of British Columbia's Island Medical Program, her Rural Family Medicine residency at McMaster University in Owen Sound, ON and her EM year at Memorial University.



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What do you miss the most about your life pre pandemic & what are you most looking forward to when pandemic is over?

Most of all, I miss being able to experience the full range of human emotion and connection; to share smiles and express with more than just our eyes, to hug freely, to celebrate and mourn without restrictions; to be able to spontaneously break out into (indoor) dancing when a great song comes on, to gather with friends and meet new ones, and to have our home be a hub for these connections.

Some of my most important wellness activities include dance and social gatherings with friends. Thankfully with the vaccine, dance classes and performances have reopened, and this has been a gamechanger! We also love to host friends and bring people together, so I cannot wait until it is safe to broaden our circles again. During the pandemic we have had several weddings, funerals, significant birthdays, and holidays, all with limitations on how we could gather. But I am so excited for the day when we can experience these moments again to their fullest.

Given your work environment and stage of your career, what does wellness look like to you?

Wellness is a moving target, and something that I will likely never perfect, but will continuously strive for. My vision for wellness is having an effective transition between work and home to allow me to be fully present in each setting, and to not have one adversely affect the other. While there will always be challenging workdays, wellness is feeling a sense of joy, and fulfilment from work. The other side of the coin is burnout, and it is often a fine line between the two. For me, a sign of burnout is compassion fatigue and feeling emotionally drained from caring so deeply about the struggles of others, many of which we can do nothing to fix. Wellness is when I have the energy and emotional reserve to support others, when I feel excited to go to work and I am not counting down until my next day off.

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What has the COVID pandemic taught you (and/or your family and friends) about wellness? Have you had to redefine what this means to you and your loved ones, and if so, how?

The pandemic has provided some important reminders. It has showed us that our “wellness routine” needs to be flexible and adaptable. When gyms and indoor activities close, there needs to be a flexibility to find new ways of being active, when social gatherings are restricted, we need to get creative about connecting virtually. It is also a reminder that just like our hospitals need “surge capacity” so do WE. We need to have enough resilience and not be stretched too thin, so that when crises arise, we have enough buffer room to cope.

Finally, it reminded me of my priorities and what matters most. Early in the pandemic when meetings, conferences, weddings, and projects were put on hold, what was left was my relationships with others. There was a period of a few months when I suddenly had only my patients and my loved ones to focus on. The rest of what we do is important, and we can create lasting and system-wide positive change, but the individual patients I interact with, and my family and friends are at the center of all that I do.