



Welcome to the most recent issue of Rural Rounds, which includes information and updates for members of the Section of Rural Medicine.

January 26, 2026

Dear Colleagues,

The first few weeks of 2026 have been stressful for our health care system, and I am sure you have all seen the many news stories and government announcements relating to the crisis in Alberta's emergency departments. The focus on this crisis was prompted, in part, by the tragic death of Mr. Prashant Sreekumar, who died on December 22, 2025, after waiting nearly eight hours in an Edmonton emergency room with chest pain. He was one of three individuals who died in that facility on that same day. In the intervening weeks, there has been much discussion about the many factors that have led to this untenable situation, and I commend my emergency medicine colleagues for speaking out on behalf of patients.

I also want to commend my colleagues who are working in emergency departments in rural and remote communities across Alberta. We are seeing many of the same challenges as our urban ED colleagues, including an overwhelming respiratory virus season, which are compounded by the reality of ongoing ED closures that have become all too common in recent years. Over the past few weeks, there were [temporary bed or space reductions](#) in communities such as Hinton, Rocky Mountain House, Lacombe, Smoky Lake and Athabasca, among many, many others. When an ED in a rural community is not available, patients are redirected to neighbouring communities to receive care, creating additional pressures on the receiving EDs and the Rural Generalists who care for those patients once they arrive. Despite the pressures rural and remote EDs face, we carry on, working as part of skilled care teams with often limited resources, to see patients and deliver essential care to the people who need us. I extend my thanks, and my appreciation, to everyone who is delivering exceptional care under extraordinary strain.

Advocating for rural health

As I've shared previously, four members of the SRM Executive recently took on additional the role of pillar liaisons for the four different health ministries. I am serving as the liaison for Primary and Preventative Health, Dr. Michael Beach is the liaison for Hospital and Surgical Health Services, Dr. Robert Halse is the liaison for Mental Health and Addiction and Dr. Jonathan Somerville is the liaison for Assisted Living and Social Services. We sent letters of introduction out to the corresponding ministers late last year and have already heard back from some. A number of meetings have been booked over the next few weeks and we will be sharing information about SRM and unique rural health challenges and experiences. We will provide updates as this work continues and I encourage you to share suggestions on the rural issues you would like us to include in these discussions.

A busy year ahead

The year ahead will hold many opportunities for advocacy, engagement and action as we work to guide the policies and decisions that shape rural health. The AMA Rural Engagement Working Group (REWG) continues to meet to discuss the issues that impact rural medicine and advise the AMA Board on priorities and strategies. Members of the SRM Executive are also involved with the AMA's Geographic Representation Working Group (GRWG), a 12-member Board-appointed advisory group that is working to develop a new physician representation model that aligns with Alberta's reorganized, corridor-based health system. In addition, SRM will be involved with several upcoming conferences and events, including Cabin Fever 2026, taking place February 6-8 in Kananaskis. It's one of my favourite events, and brings together rural physician preceptors, residents and medical students to envision the future of rural medical education.

We have a lot of work to do this year and will keep you informed as it progresses. Thank you, as always, for everything you do for your patients, your communities and for the sustainability of rural and remote health.

Regards,
Rithesh Ram
President, Section of Rural Medicine