



## Update From Kamloops

My sister and I took my nieces to the Vernon waterslides the first day of the school summer vacation. It was a glorious day and we all left with the mantra we were “going to have the best summer ever.” And then, British Columbia (B.C.) began to burn. It burned for the entire summer and well into September 2017. Nearly 900,000 hectares burned and more than 39,000 B.C. residents were evacuated.

By chance, I was in Cache Creek an hour before it was evacuated due to an explosive and aggressive fire. The entire hillsides surrounding the highway were on fire and the highway and sky were streaked with red from the fire retardant dropped by the bombers. It was an eerily beautiful sight and a clear declaration of what the summer of 2017 would be.

About one third of my practice was evacuated. This led to interesting social situations. One of my patients was travelling and couldn't return to Williams Lake. He ended up in Kamloops with the dog, while his wife was in Quesnel with the cat. Due to road closures and poor visibility grounding flights, it was days until they were reunited.

Thompson Rivers University and our major arenas became evacuation centres complete with army cots. Many local residents took in complete strangers. I was very impressed by my physician colleagues who were willing to take in displaced physicians they didn't know and even their horses, etc. Kamloops was home to about 10,000 evacuees. My patients were so impressed with how well they were treated and the events that were organized for their entertainment and by the fundraisers and donations received.

The evacuations led to some pretty interesting patient situations. One evacuated nurse practitioner was doing “hotel calls” to provide patient care. I drew the line at a new start gold injection though and yes, we do on occasion, use gold in B.C.! An

evacuated physician ran a clinic for evacuees and our health authority extended privileges to evacuate physicians so they could still work while displaced.

Our air quality was hideous. On an air quality health index scale that usually goes from 1 to 7, we spent days in the 40s and 50s. I couldn't see the street from my office window, and some mornings I could see about 4 feet in front of my car. Our air quality was consistently worse than Beijing with a corresponding upswing in respiratory illnesses.

The ranchers were particularly devastated with the loss of cattle due to burned fences, loose cattle being chased off the highways and back into the fire zone, and destruction of grazing land. In typical rural fashion those who have intact pastures are caring for other farmers' cattle.

While the worst of the fire season is over, many continue to burn underground. We are hoping for a very cold winter with a lot of snow, so the fires will extinguish over the winter. We hope to be in the news next summer for our scenic surroundings rather than our raging fires.

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