

Snapshots

## Unrest in the West

Medical bush fires have flamed all around us this season in rural BC, in Prince George, Cranbrook, Quesnel — all still hot and uncontrolled. In the midst of the medical mayhem, we joyously celebrated, with family and friends, our son's wedding to a "local" Revelstoke girl in the splendour of glorious sunshine and sparkling snow-capped peaks — truly the best of what a small town can offer. It is little use to live in one of Canada's playgrounds if you have neither the time nor energy to enjoy it. But we wonder, with such limited numbers of nurses and doctors, how medicare and universal accessibility can continue.

As the leaves fall and the wind blows in our "winter of discontent," health care in BC has never looked so bleak or desolate. Previously, the towering mountains, long distances and avalanches kept the bureaucrats and politicians at bay. Now the Ministry of Health seems on a mission to seek and destroy rural physicians in BC. Some fight to stay in their communities. Some ignore, some appease, some become cynical and depressed, some just leave. Surely if we can survive the challenge of rural medicine, we can endure this.

Today is one of those crisp, colourful, gorgeous fall days that build up psychic reserves we can draw on during some bleak, cold, grey day in winter. Gusts of wind swirl the leaves. I think of how the health ministry is like the wind, always changing direction. But unlike the capricious breeze, the ministry is not so benign. In this "toxic" work



environment, it is important to remember that we do not practise rural medicine because it is demanding and difficult, but because it is challenging and worth while. We live in the majestic mountains beside crystal streams and we enjoy clean air and water that other Canadians and the rest of the world visit for holidays. "Life is the best here," our 4 children remind us. Just as the long, cold winter moulds the character of Canadians, our rugged, hard, majestic and impenetrable mountains make Westerners a practical and individualistic breed. As we hunker down for winter we may be left questioning our strengths, our resources and our resolve, but never the beauty of our surroundings. — *Mary Johnston*, family physician, Revelstoke, BC