Diane Simpson PhD, MDE, will be retiring from her role as Education Consultant after fourteen years working for the Office of Continuing Medical Education and Professional Development (CME&PD), Cumming School of Medicine (CSM), University of Calgary.

Diane started her career as a physiotherapist working in Manitoba, and later with the Calgary Health Region at the Alberta Children’s Hospital. After obtaining post-graduate degrees in Physiology and Distance Education with a focus on Medical Rehabilitation, Diane decided to create an online Journal Club for Rural Psychiatrists. It was through this work that she started collaborating with and eventually joining the CME&PD.

Over the years, Diane has seen a lot of changes in people, courses and technology at the CME&PD including the digitization of medical education.

“When I first started, the office was all paper, registration was paper...marketing was paper, we even used to have stuffing envelopes time” Diane said, remarking on how the office used to do business.

Change happened slowly over time as the technology got better, and as the audience started to shift.

“When I started 14 years ago, there were a lot of boomers who were still the main group of physicians ...and learning any new technology was yet another chore on top of all their other work.” Diane said of the changing audience of CME, “now as the millennials are becoming physicians and other healthcare professionals they are wanting [online education.]”

This came to a head in March 2020 when the pandemic forced what had become a blended learning situation to one that was entirely online. Before COVID-19, only five of CME's largest conferences (Calgary Therapeutics Course, Pearls Family Practice, Current Obstetric Management Seminars, Calgary Pain Conference, and Poison and Drug Information Service) had webcast portions, and attendees were still given paper packages when they arrived on site—with online content limited to handouts only. Since then, the CME has shifted all of its content to online webinars and virtual conferences.

"In some ways COVID-19 streamlined a lot of things and made it easier for the CME to fully embrace online education.” - Diane Simpson

Written by Shannon Stucky

May 27th, 2020
Diane doesn’t believe that the CME&PD will ever go back to entirely face-to-face delivery of its education. “Online is more convenient, especially for those who would like to attend out of Calgary.” The transition to online education has also given the CME&PD the chance to showcase national and international speakers who otherwise wouldn’t have been able to share their expertise with Alberta’s physicians and other health care providers.

During her time with the CME&PD, Diane was privileged to work with a large number of people, including with many program assistants, education coordinators, education consultants, managers, directors, planning committee members and three Associate Deans.

“Jocelyn [Lockyer] was foundational, Lara [Cooke] was stability and Kelly [Burak] is growth and adaptability” Diane said of the Associate Deans she has worked with.

Diane explained how Jocelyn Locker PhD was foundational for both the CME&PD and the Physician Learning Program, and how she was also the person who first asked the question ‘what makes education useful or ‘sticky’”?

As Associate Dean, Lara Cooke MD, MSc, FRCPC was a stabilizing force for the office in both processes and economics. She developed CME&PD’s four strategic pillars: Sustainability, Excellence in Education, Community Engagement and Scholarship.

The current Associate Dean, Kelly Burak MD, MSc, FRCPC, has led the office through a time of growth and adaptability. Under his leadership the CME&PD focused on digitizing education and promoting physician practice improvement.

Technology and people weren’t the only things that changed during Diane’s time with the CME&PD, new processes and administrative systems were instituted, including use of a communal share drive with standardized folders and naming conventions, multiple registration systems, the introduction of the customer relationship management tool Marketo, and multiple website upgrades. Diane was happy to have been able to contribute to the standardization of processes in the office, and remarked on how having consistency made everything flow and work better for both the staff and the attendees.
When asked if she had a favourite course or event she has worked on over the years, Diane responded “I enjoyed all of the courses that I’ve worked on, and I’ve made good friends...It’s like you can’t pick your favourite child!”

Before her last day on June 4th, 2021, Diane hopes to impart some last tips and tricks using her extensive knowledge of accreditation standards of the Royal College of Family Physicians and the College of Family Physicians of Canada, and compile a needs assessment for use in next year’s curriculum development.

“I don’t think I will ever stop working, but I will miss the people. They are a good group; really hard working and dedicated.” Diane said about working with the people at the CME&PD.

“Diane has been such a valuable member of our team and personally has taught me so much about CPD. If I ever had a question about accreditation standards, she was always the go to person. We will miss her knowledge and professionalism, but she can retire knowing that she made us all better as a CPD team.” says Kelly Burak, Associate Dean, CME&PD, CSM, UCalgary.

In her retirement, Diane and her husband of 36 years will split their time between their homes in Calgary and Vancouver. Diane plans to spend her time working on several projects including the digitization of family photo albums, the organization of her father’s coin collection, and tending to her garden.

Congratulations on your retirement Diane! You shall be missed.