

Web profile: Dr. Janis Dionne

It seems some people are born knowing what they will be when they grow up. More of us come upon our chosen paths through a longer process, often involving a fair bit of trial and error. And for some, including pediatric nephrologist Janis Dionne, career choice seems more a matter of fate. But more on that later.

Growing up in Calgary, Janis says she never had a strong sense of wanting to become a doctor, but she did well at school and medicine appeared an interesting option. She did her medical training at the University of Alberta and discovered to her surprise that in sessions with young children, many of them would end up toddling her way rather than toward her med school colleagues. That observation suggested pediatrics as a direction for her medical career.

For her pediatric residency, Janis was assigned to the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon – a disappointment, she admits, as it was not among her top choices. Because the university’s pediatric program had few senior residents, Janis and her first-year colleagues provided a lot of the care for children coming to the hospital, including children needing palliative care.

“That was hard to deal with at the time,” says Janis. To help with the stress, she would often phone her mother. On one of those calls, her mother brought up the story of her first child, born years before Janis, who had serious medical issues and only lived a couple of years – much of that time spent at the hospital. Almost incidentally, she mentioned that the hospital was the same one where Janis was completing her residency.

Janis was stunned. “I had totally forgotten this,” she says. “I had never lived in Saskatoon before, and I hadn’t known that I would do pediatrics, but now I was learning to become a pediatrician in the same hospital where my sister, who died well before I was born, had spent much of her life as a patient.”

“To me, it seemed something had brought me there at that time to learn pediatrics – like it was pre-determined in some funny way.” Call it fate.

Janis has been at BC Children’s Hospital since 2006 and was recently appointed the BC Renal Agency’s medical director for pediatric kidney services. In that role she is responsible for leading programs that support dialysis care for 15-20 children from around the province, and clinical care for the 150 children across BC with chronic kidney disease.

She is happily married and the mother of a very active five-year-old boy. When asked about her “extracurricular interests,” Janis chuckles and admits the demands of her work and managing the high-energy activities of her son leave little time for anything else, although she loves every minute of it.
