



Pulling together

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Dr. Monica Kidd has written two novels and three volumes of poetry; she's followed seabirds from Newfoundland and Labrador to the Antarctic. She worked her way up to being the CBC's national science journalist, and then went to medical school. These days, she's a mother and family doctor in Calgary. She's never stopped writing. If you're curious about her unusual career, you can read a profile about Kidd in the Jan. 9, 2017, issue. We hope you enjoy Coda and, as always, we welcome your feedback.

In a previous Coda column, I bemoaned a recent renewed sense of “us versus them” among some Alberta doctors over health spending. A subtitle to that piece might have been the joke a patient told me the other day: *What's the difference between God and a specialist? God doesn't think he's a specialist.* (Not endorsing, just repeating. But I did laugh.)

Most times, I'm happy to say, it's not like this. It's often in shared care arrangements where I feel the strongest sense of pulling together around something important. Malpresentation in a woman whisked off the street in labour with no prenatal care. Cord prolapse after ruptured membranes. Providing — ahem — formidable fundal pressure in a difficult cesarean delivery in spite of my 5'2" frame.

As I write this, the committee that was struck to oversee the resettlement of Fort McMurray, Alberta, following the wildfire of 2016 is meeting for the last time. I remember hanging on every word of the initial coverage of that fire: single-file escapes down the highway as vehicle headlights melted from the heat of the flames; parents separated from children during the evacuation using pleas over public airwaves in the hope of reuniting; family pets left behind to fend for themselves. Fort McMurray's then-fire chief, Darby Allen, put words to what we all felt when he described the fire as a beast, seeming to move with intention.

It was an entire city in danger, and it was *Fort Mac*: a main economic engine for Newfoundland and Labrador, my other home, since so many Newfoundlanders had moved there for work. Members of the committee say there were failures in the resettlement of Fort McMurray following the fire, but mostly successes. But what continues to humble (and baffle) me is that in an emergency in which 100 000 had to

flee with little warning, only two people died — and that was in a car accident.

In Darby Allen's unapologetic naming of the fear that bound everyone in that fire, we were brought together: there was nothing more important than getting people out safely. Oil and gas companies lent their facilities and gear to the evacuation and firefighting efforts; workers at the companies and the communities they influence relied on level-headed emergency preparedness to stay orderly; first responders did what they do every day, but on a scale many of them had never been called to before. The rest of us witnessed, donated money and stuff, and took in people needing housing. Many of us set aside our political opinions on the energy sector and just focused on the people.

In some ways, nothing brings people together more than a disaster. I have seen all kinds of attempts at interprofessional exercises in health care that unfortunately seem to ingrain our differences rather than help us transcend them. But I love the times, inside and outside of health care, when we can park our credentials and initials and various lineages at the door and just help as best we can.

That malpresentation I mentioned? It happened to me recently. We paged the obstetrician on call, whose experience and calm allowed her to deliver the patient's baby safely, and

vaginally. The neonatal intensive care unit team was ready for anything; in the end they simply had to dry the healthy baby and hand her back to her surprised mom. Both patients safe, we all took a breath. I don't know about the others in the room, but I felt huge pride that we all just made it happen, with a minimum of drama, and helped this young woman through what might have been the most traumatic episode of her life.

I don't know what comes next for Fort Mac, or for the mom and baby. Whatever happens, I hope all of us, when called, can keep pulling together to help.

**I love the times
when we just help.**