

After coming to practice family medicine for 12 months, Williams wraps up 44 year career



By Brock Weir

Robert Williams arrived in Aurora in 1970 as a young general practitioner intending to stay for a year or so before moving onto the second phase in his career as a plastic surgeon.

44 years later, and after caring for four generations of Aurora residents from his general practice on Yonge Street, Dr. Williams will officially hang up his stethoscope this Friday.

‘If someone has been around for 44 years, that means, when I started, a 20-year-old patient is now 64,’ he says, with a degree of wonder. ‘That is a whole umbrella of their life. When I started to think about retirement, I realised that for us doctors, it is not just a job. We get into people’s lives and that is a privilege and an honour.’

Giving up this honour, he says, has not been an easy decision, but a decision he had to make. It is not that he is tired of it, but after five decades of long days and nights, the things he still wants to accomplish are starting to mount up.

When he eventually made the decision, one of his key considerations was making sure his patients could find a new physician. Just over a handful of years ago, it was very difficult to find a doctor, but once he started talking about his impending retirement last summer, other doctors have since come out of the woodwork to take in new patients.

It is a far cry from the community he came to as a doctor in his early 20s, spending what he thought was a one year commitment working at the practice of Dr. Rose in what is now Yellow Brick House. With a goal of becoming a GP, Dr. Williams says he thought the most sensible route was to look outside of Toronto for a practice as there would be a better chance of looking after one’s own patients.

After exploring options in Oakville and Burlington, and even as far north as Port Carling, he and his wife decided that Aurora was the place. Back then, GPs were jacks-of-all-trades to their community as far as healthcare was concerned. Walk-in clinics were still a few years away and community doctors took it in turns to be on call certain nights and when others weren’t able to otherwise cover their own patients.

Bayview Avenue was still a dirt road and one could get from Aurora to what is now Southlake in relative lightning speed compared to today’s traffic.

‘I stayed [with Dr. Rose] for about 11 years and I decided I needed my own place,’ he says of his present office, which became

operational in 1980. ?I live above the shop and that has worked out really well. Although I was just going to do it for a year, I thought I was suited to be a general physician and here I am 44 years later.?

Since 1978, Dr. Williams has gone beyond the role of a traditional doctor. Although he was one of the rare ones who still made occasional house calls to long-time patients who were unable to come and see him, his repertoire expanded into cognitive behavioural therapy, meditation, hypnotherapy, and, more recently, Botox and fillers.

Regardless of innovation in the medical field, cosmetic or otherwise, however, he maintains the most important thing for a doctor is to actually listen to their patients.

?What I am probably going to miss the most is the interaction with the patients,? he says. ?That is the fun part of the day. If you talk to my patients, they'll probably say, ?He's always behind' and that has been me all my career. Most of that is because if someone needs the time then, within reason, I want to give them the time. That is why I am here.

?I think the biggest thrill for me is the four generations because that is how it all started. A lady who is having a baby [was here recently and] I said, ?Do you realise I have looked after your grandmother, I looked after your mother, I delivered you, and now I am seeing your kids?' That takes a doctor being here, the patient being here, and I don't think that is going to happen anymore here.?