

OUR DOCS TEACH! PHYSICIAN APPRECIATION WEEK

How Lucky Can I Be? DR. SARAH O'CONNELL

By Ian Burns

Dr. Sarah O'Connell has lived a bit of a nomadic existence. But now she says the Southern Georgian Bay area feels more like home than anywhere she has ever lived.

O'Connell began practicing family medicine full-time at Penetanguishene's Bayside Medical Centre, after taking over the practice of Dr. Louis Nel as of April 1.

But she has been in North Simcoe for a bit longer than that, providing maternity leave coverage for Bayside's Dr. Wendy Davie last summer and fall.

O'Connell was born in Canada, but spent much of her early life abroad, moving to England at age five and Northern Ireland when she was ten.

"My parents were entertainers," she said. "Then they got divorced and my mother married a man from Northern Ireland so we moved there."

But she eventually returned to Canada, and completed her undergraduate education at Dalhousie University in Halifax and her medical degree at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland.



Sarah & Eamonn

After moving to Kingston, ON to complete her family medicine training at Queen's University she met her husband, Eamonn O'Connell.

"The joke was if he wanted me to stay in Ontario he had to get me near water in a small town," she said.

O'Connell and her husband-to-be came to Midland/Penetanguishene in February 2015, on what she calls "a whim" through HealthForceOntario.

"I told them what I was looking for and they said the Midland area would be a perfect fit," she said. "We booked a trip to come up here and the rest is history."

O'Connell said both she and Eamonn, who she married on Valentine's Day this year, have really felt welcomed in their new community.

"Everyone here is so friendly and you have everything you need close by," she said. "Plus it felt like instant family here at Bayside."

O'Connell was happy to assume Dr. Nel's patients when he asked her to take over his practice, saying it means his patients won't be orphaned.

"I was thinking of setting up my own practice but this was much easier," she said. "It's always ideal when you can take over from someone."

Her husband, Eamonn, is a filmmaker who has also started to plant roots here. O'Connell said much of his work can be done from home, which is a four-season cottage on the water in Penetanguishene that the couple has been working on.

"I pinch myself every day," she said. "Is this my life? How lucky can I be?"