

Resident physicians cram backpacks with care

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Earlier this year, between graveyard shifts doing eye surgery, resident ophthalmologist Michelle Carle picked up an old backpack and stuffed it with necessities like toothbrushes and toques, underwear and soap.

Next week, the backpack that once carried her medical textbooks will be delivered to a homeless person in need, along with about 20 others put together by other young Alberta doctors in celebration of National Resident Physician Awareness Day on Feb. 9.

"We residents tend to be short of time, but we all have backpacks and we all go shopping for toiletries," Carle said. "We see a lot of people who are marginalized, and they come into the hospital with preventable injuries, like cold-related injuries. We hope these backpacks are distributed to people who are in need, and that they are able to put those items to use."

The idea for the backpack drive was born late last year when Drs. Diana Hong and Henry Conter started

contemplating ways for young doctors to help people outside the hospital setting.

They figured that since doctors go to school for so long, they must have old backpacks lying around, and those backpacks could be put to good use by others.

They brought the idea to the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta, and the organization took the project to heart.

Executive director Sarah Thomas said the group wanted to do something meaningful in the community that also had special significance for young doctors.

"Residency is like a rite of passage, in a way. It's when physicians move out of the classroom and into the hospital," she said. "They no longer need their backpacks, so we are giving them to people who can make better use of them, and giving back to the community."

Between Dec. 15 and Jan. 31, the group collected more than 20 backpacks full of everything from energy bars to underwear.

The bags will be delivered to drop-in shelters in Edmonton and Calgary next week.

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From left to right, resident physicians Michelle Carle, Roby Ryan, Shaun Loewen, Henry Conter, Carrie Ye, Peter Kwan and Richdeep Gill have filled 20 backpacks with toiletries for the homeless as a way to help people outside of a hospital setting. The backpacks will go to the Bissell Centre and other homeless shelters and facilities.