



Above: Nine-year-old leukemia patient, Kevin, laughs as Dr. Derek Prevost (below left) examines him prior to his treatment.

Oncologist: This job is a privilege



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Photos by Evan Seal

Dr. Derek Prevost – who established the pediatric oncology clinic at Surrey Memorial Hospital – says his role as a cancer doctor emphasizes the importance of family

His is a job many people might view as unbearably sad.

But Dr. Derek Prevost simply doesn't see it that way.

"I think I'm extraordinarily privileged to do what I do. Seeing families go through what they go through is obviously very enriching for me as a person. I'm constantly being exposed to the importance of health and family.

"Even on the unusual occasion where we can't cure kids, there's some gain in being able to help those families in a dignified way."

Close to 50 children under the age of 17 were treated for cancer at Surrey Memorial Hospital last year. Prevost estimates there are just two to three deaths of the clinic's patients annually. But on a daily basis, he and his staff treat children with multiple forms of cancer, in various stages.

It's an often difficult time for kids and families, and Prevost develops close relationships with them. He knows every one of his patients' home numbers and they are also free to page him at all times of the day or night.

"Some people would say that makes it harder if a child dies, but I actually don't agree with that. I think it somehow makes it more important to be a helpful citizen in a palliative setting."

Prevost began medical school at UBC in the early '90s, completing his pediatric residency at Queens University in 1997. He proceeded to a pediatric/hematology/oncology/bone marrow transplant fellowship and by 1999 was practising pediatric oncology at B.C. Children's Hospital in Vancouver.

July of 2000 welcomed the birth of his son and Prevost's priorities changed. He took nearly two years off to be with his family.