

## The BCMA—tell them what you think

**W**riting an editorial is sometimes like going to the dentist. You can't think of one reason why you'd sit down in a room with someone intent on causing you pain, but when it's all over, you realize that it didn't hurt a bit and you suddenly feel proud you had the guts to do it. However, the following editorial has been a piece of cake to write. It also helps that this turns out to be an editorial that nicely follows the one I wrote for last month's *BCMJ* concerning the need to be reassured about the sanctity of democratic processes in the BCMA. The BCMA, it turns out, was already in the process of designing a membership survey as part of a very serious attempt to measure their own performance with the owners of this extremely influential professional association. The BCMA seems to be concerned that there may be some discontent among members with regard to how well it serves its members.

In other words, are most of us happy with how the association deals with our collective political and professional aspirations? Is the association democratic? Is the association providing individual members with all the information—or at least a means of safely accessing politically sensitive information? Is the association hiding things (or not), in your opinion? I'm sure there will be a lot more questions, but they will apparently follow the general theme of "How are we doing?" and "How can we make things better?" In addition to the questions around governance, democratic processes, communication efficiencies, transparency, and economics there will be another section dedicated to service. In other words, when you phone up requesting information about insurance, ski passes, hockey tickets, and so on, do you get quick, courteous

helpful service, or not?

This response has been in the making apparently for quite some time now, and I have to applaud the association's decision to survey the membership over what has been a low-grade background hubbub of discontent for a few years now. Recently the Ontario Medical Association (OMA) surveyed their membership and found an enormous amount of discontent among their members with the way their association was doing business. So the OMA systemized a plan to address the identified problems and were very successful in returning a real sense of ownership to the huge, historically apathetic membership. The OMA since then has done regular membership surveys, feeling this

device is an extremely important planning component in the long-term success of the association, both professionally and politically.

The BCMA membership survey will be coming out in January and will be going to every BCMA member. In other words, this is not a random poll of opinions and attitudes that some statistician will then evaluate and calculate error likelihoods. There is always the possibility that pollsters pick the "wrong people," and although this is an unlikely statistical event it is often the cry of nay sayers whenever polls don't find agreement with that group's contrary point of view. Additionally, the topic of question semantics and topic selection is often raised

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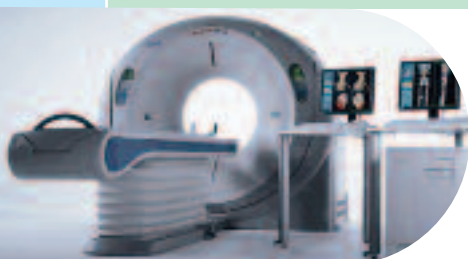
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as way of influencing the statistical results of polls and surveys by subtly directing the way respondents answer. In this instance, I believe that the questions are simple and direct, and are designed to get useful answers.

Knowing all this, it is extremely important that all of you take a few minutes and complete the survey. If you are ever going to participate in any survey this has to be it. The BCMA needs all of us to let them know what we think, what we expect, and what we need from them. This is our professional association; we own it, we're the shareholders, and it represents us. Your feelings about the insti-

tution and the group of people who represent you, who are paid to serve you and who are trying to find a way to do it properly, need to have all of us answer the important questions in this survey. The only way the association has to quantify opinion and, in turn, formulate reasonable, rational long-term member-friendly planning is for there to be an overwhelming majority of membership response.

An old adage probably fits here (with a little editorial licence): "If it's broke, let's fix it. If it ain't broke, then let's make it better." —JAW

