

Preparing our medical student colleagues for the future

Planning for the future in an era of exponential health care change is quite a task for all associations. Associations must also stay relevant to its members, especially younger ones. To address this issue, the BCMA is embarking on a new venture with our medical student colleagues that will be a great step forward in establishing the relevance of the BCMA by building a better understanding and appreciation of the association among the doctors of tomorrow.

Since September we have been meeting with students in all four years of UBC's Faculty of Medicine program to determine with them how best to address their needs and increase the Association's value from the student's standpoint. The CMA Leaders' Forum sparked the idea. This is a well-attended, 2-day event held annually in Ottawa that addresses the fact that physicians are in leadership roles throughout their careers, yet don't always feel that they have the necessary skills for the job. At this forum, medical students, residents, and practising physicians learn about advocacy, media relations, physician health, and countless other topics. Unfortunately, many students or residents are unable to attend this event.

To address this problem, the BCMA is developing a workshop series specifically for doctors in training that would encompass many of the topics from the CMA Leaders' Forum but will offer it in discrete sessions over the 4 years of medical school. To create a successful program, it is crucial to include students in planning and implementation, and their participation to date has been full and valuable. Together, we have developed a list of topics that interest them, and the program will begin shortly. We hope to extend it to residents soon.

Some topics that students suggested were predictable, but we have also been surprised by some of their requests. Their interest in presentation skills, debt management, media training, and lobbying was understandable—today's medical students are intelligent, articulate, and forward-thinking in a way that could make many of us wonder whether we'd make the cut if we had to apply to medical school now!—and some students were surprisingly focused on what they term “the business side of medicine.”

Last year I spoke to the Family

*I wish each of you
a very happy
holiday season and a
peaceful, joyful new year.*

Practice Club, where over 70 students from all four years came to hear about the future of family medicine. A number of students told me that they were seriously considering a career in family practice, but without more knowledge about how one would actually operate a small business—a GP's office—they were uncomfortable choosing family medicine in the CaRMS match. The uncertainty of the future of family medicine, combined with student loans of \$150,000 or more, was steering some students away from their first career choice of family medicine. The business side of medicine will be the topic of one of the first workshops we offer.

The students' clearly articulated need to learn more about conflict resolution was not surprising but defi-

nately disappointing. They felt they'd learned a lot about how to deal with a difficult patient or family but had trouble coping with the conflicts that many of them had experienced with other students, residents, their attending physicians, and other health care providers. Some described feeling shocked, helpless, and damaged by these conflicts and although they did not use this term, what they want is to become “resilient physicians.” They want the tools to deal with such conflict, and they want to walk away from it completely intact.

When I spoke to the first-year medical students at their orientation this year, they were very interested in learning to lobby. So we are designing a program to teach students how to influence the federal and provincial governments on the serious problem of medical student debt. It is clear that the 375% increase in tuition over the past 5 years is leading to quite spectacular levels of debt for trainees. It's no wonder that high debt levels are influencing career choices for some of our young colleagues.

The Association does have its own agenda—it's not hidden. The BCMA hopes that some of the students we are spending time with now will become active in our Association at an earlier stage in their careers. This will strengthen and refresh the BCMA and keep it relevant for future members.

Many great things are possible for our profession and our patients. The future is bright. You only have to look into the faces of these doctors of tomorrow to see the promise and potential.

—Margaret MacDiarmid, MD
BCMA President