

A look back...

I am writing this, my final column as your president, on a beautiful sunny Vancouver spring day. In a few weeks, my term as president will be over, and I will be handing over to my successor Dr Margaret MacDiarmid. This is traditionally a time to reflect on the achievements of the BCMA during the past year. It has certainly been an interesting time for me, as it is for every president. Each president has his or her own unique set of challenges to deal with, and each president tries to build on the gains made by their predecessors.

My term started last June with the Supreme Court of Canada ruling in the Chaoulli and Zeliotis case, which has the potential to change the options that our patients have to obtain medical care in Canada. The Province of Quebec has until June 9 to implement changes in order to satisfy the ruling. We have to wait and see what those changes are, and what this may mean for the rest of Canada.

As a result of our previous agreement, this past summer the General Practice Services Committee proposed

a package of reforms designed to improve the delivery of care by family practitioners, and which also attempted to better reward full-service family doctors. There was spirited debate around the proposals and many expressed significant concerns. The proposals were sent to BC's family physicians for referendum, and they did not pass.

This set the stage for negotiations that started last fall. Originally slated to discuss the third year re-opener of the 2004 Working Agreement, it became apparent that it was in the interest of both the profession and government to see if a comprehensive agreement covering a wide range of issues could be achieved. Protecting and strengthening our Master Agreement was of particular concern to us. Our negotiating team was able to secure an unprecedented 6-year tentative agreement that strengthens family practice, provides funds to help correct specialist disparities, funds information technology for physicians' offices, protects our Master Agreement, and lays down a framework that allows us to work with government and health authorities on issues affecting us as physicians—ultimately affecting the

care we give to our patients. As of this writing the date of ratification is still some time off, but if it is accepted by our members, the Agreement will enable us to spend our resources and efforts on what we want to do and what we do best—providing care for our patients.

Ongoing projects throughout the year include the governance review being undertaken by the Committee on Governance and Restructuring. Its final report will be presented at the Annual Meeting on June 10. The report will be widely available and all members will decide how we wish to govern our organization.

This past year I was honored to represent the BCMA at meetings with the provincial health minister and the previous federal (Liberal) minister of health, as well as the provincial opposition leader and health critic, and to address the provincial governments' select standing committees on finance and health.

In media interviews throughout BC and across the country, I attempted to put forward the collective views of BC physicians on topics that included physician shortages, increasing



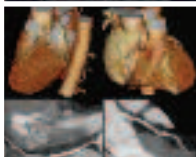
Continued on page 208

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
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Continued from page 207

wait lists, a public/private health care system, medical tourism, childhood obesity, and reducing medical student debt. And I endeavored to publicly hold governments accountable when they were failing to enable the provision of medical care to our patients in a timely manner.

I have enjoyed working with my executive and Board of Directors who give freely of their time to strengthen the BCMA for the benefit of all doctors and our patients. The Society of General Practitioners and Society of Specialist Physicians and Surgeons have been invaluable partners and I thank their presidents for their time and effort, cooperation, and collegiality.

The BCMA staff, led by Dr Mark Schonfeld, always go the extra mile. BCMA presidents are asked to be familiar with a huge range of issues. This would be impossible without the knowledge, input, and sage advice from the BCMA staff on every occasion.

As I look out of the window at the mountains and the ocean, I am in awe of this amazing province which we are fortunate to call home. We have a standard of living envied by much of the rest of the world, and a safe and relatively peaceful environment. We have a medical system that without doubt needs improving, but we have the skill, knowledge, and will to make those improvements so that physician satisfaction is increased and our patients are not without access to necessary medical services.

It has been an enormous honor and privilege to serve as your president this past year. I look forward to working with your incoming president and her new executive, and I am very pleased to be able to offer Dr MacDiarmid my support in the coming year. Thank you again for the opportunity to work for you and for our patients.

—Michael Golbey, MD
BCMA President