

Healthy doctors

As I contemplate the year ahead, I am humbled by the opportunity to serve my colleagues. I know that it will be a busy and an exciting year. Being president of our association is a task I very much look forward to, take seriously, and will perform to my utmost ability. Thank you for the opportunity.

As well as the inherent duties of office that accompany this position, there are four areas I will want to focus on during my tenure. The key theme here is “healthy.” Being a pediatrician, children’s health now and into the future is a top priority of mine; a healthy working relationship with government will benefit all of us involved with delivering care to patients; and a healthy medical association will benefit all physicians as we conduct our business—you will hear more about these topics in the future.

At this time I want to focus on the fourth area of interest, which is healthy physicians. As physicians we spend our days—and many of our evenings and weekends—caring for the health of our patients. Too often it is at the expense of our own health—both physical and mental, or the health of our family members. When our working lives and personal lives are not in balance, stress levels are likely to rise.

I think this imbalance rings particularly true in today’s environment. The pressures of long hours and high workloads, the feeling of too little time to adequately spend with our patients, and the lack of resources are all taking their toll. In fact, according to the *British Medical Journal*, 28% of physicians report above-average levels of stress compared with 18% of the general population.

The results are increasing rates of burnout, depression, and even suicide. Achieving balance in life is something

that each person needs to take control of. Being a medical practitioner is a very important job, but we all need to make sure that it doesn’t take up more of our lives than it should.

Your association talks in terms of “Healthy patients, happy doctors.” I think that describes the goals of your association in a nutshell. I also think we can add healthy doctors to that maxim. We are working hard on the former—healthy patients. We need to work harder on the latter.

Medical school training, as great as it is in teaching us about medicine and taking care of others, taught us to be strong, determined, even invincible, but not how to take care of ourselves when things go awry or to know when to ask for help. We are just as human as our patients, and sometimes adverse things happen.

When we have real issues to deal with we can, fortunately, take advantage of the Physician Health Program funded by the BCMA, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the provincial government. As president of the BCMA, I will make sure this program continues to improve and meet the needs of our members.

Chances are you know when your life is out of balance. You know when you are dedicating time and energy into something in neglect of more personal values. Often the resulting feeling is resentment and frustration.

I have compiled some tips that I hope will keep you centred and balanced:

- Build downtime into your schedule—a little relaxation goes a long way.
- Drop activities that sap your time and energy—you know which ones they are.
- Get moving—active people have reduced stress levels and more energy.

- Learn to say no—you’re not doing yourself any favors by taking on even more.
- Leave work at work—you’ll spend quality time with your family and on yourself.
- Bolster your support system—delegate just a little bit more to your MOA, and look for ways to work more efficiently with partners.
- Manage your time—it is better to do a little bit each day rather than saving it all for one day.
- Nurture yourself—make sure you take care of you and get regular checkups by your physician.

Striking a healthy balance in your life isn’t something that you do just once and expect it to last forever. It is a constant work in progress as life’s priorities change. So, periodically keep tabs on those priorities using a work-life balance lens, be aware of when pressure starts to build, and re-evaluate the tools you use to keep that balance in check.

I am looking forward to hearing from many of you and to meeting as many of you as possible during the coming year.

—**Nasir Jetha, MD**
BCMA President

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