

## The legacy of Dr Mark Schonfeld

**A**fter 14 years at the helm of the BC Medical Association, steering it on a steady course to success, Dr Mark Schonfeld is retiring. I have known Mark Schonfeld for 26 years, and throughout that time he has been a leader, a mentor, and a friend. It's not just me who feels this way; he has made this impression on almost everyone.

Mark began his BCMA career in 1983 first as a Board member, then 13 years later as president, and moving to director of professional relations for 2 years before becoming executive director and CEO. All said and done, Mark has been involved with the BCMA for 28 years. He put his heart and soul into the association, wanting nothing more than for physicians to have the resources they need to practise good medicine and be remunerated appropriately, and for patients to be healthy and receive the care they need. After 14 years as CEO, he has made great headway.

Member polling tells us that physicians are happy with the direction the

BCMA is taking, feel well informed on BCMA activities, and believe they get good value for the dues they pay. Consider this: the BCMA is the only medical association in the country for which membership is voluntary, and 95% of all eligible physicians choose to be members. That says something about the successful management of this association.

The association is thriving today because of his vision—it is stable, progressive, financially sound (without raising member dues in the last 7 years), and considered by many as the number one medical association in the country. But that wasn't the case when Mark first assumed the leadership role. Fourteen years ago, the BCMA had an acrimonious relationship with government, offered fewer services to members, and stood at half its current size. Mark should be proud of his accomplishments, of which there are many.

Mark directed the association and demonstrated great leadership through some very diverse periods. After a

5-year struggle, the solution to the RVG (Relative Value Guide) dispute occurred while he was BCMA president. And then 6 years later, once Mark had assumed the CEO position, government legislated doctors under

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Bill 9. But Mark provided the guidance the association needed to ensure its mandate: to promote a social, economic, and political climate in which members can provide the citizens of British Columbia with the highest standard of health care while achieving maximum professional satisfaction and fair economic reward. He saw

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us through that gloomy period and from that point forward the association has prospered.

For most of Mark's tenure, the association had an extremely cordial and collegial relationship with the BC government, and the Ministry of Health in particular. He stood up for physicians, played hardball when necessary, and built and cultivated this relationship. We have collaborated on numerous programs that have benefited not only physicians, but patients and the health care system as well.

Mark is well aware that an organization is only as good as the people within it—be they staff or physicians involved in one of the many committees that make up the BCMA. And because of that he has the great leadership ability of allowing the people who report to him the freedom to do their jobs and grow in their positions. Mark treats people with respect, and in return, is respected himself—a lot of positive work gets accomplished this way.

Mark recognized a worthy program when it was presented to him, and knew to let his people go with it and make it flourish. These programs include the General Practice Services Committee, the Specialist Services

Committee, the Shared Care Committee, and the Physician Information Technology Office, all of which are designed to benefit physicians and advance the practice of medicine.

Under his leadership, the Council on Health Promotion and the Council on Health Economics and Policy have continued to grow and make important changes to the health of British Columbians and the ways in which physicians practise medicine. The work of these councils has contributed to legislating cell phone driving laws, ensuring that addiction is a covered service for patients, and making the change to patient-focused funding, among many other things. Together, these initiatives have shown the BCMA to be one of the most progressive and productive bodies on these fronts in the country.

And it's not just all-encompassing programs that have come of age; member-only programs offered directly to physicians have also grown under Mark's stewardship. The Telus plan for members provides physicians with great opportunities to save on something they use every day. The insurance offerings and benefits available to BCMA members are much more comprehensive than they were 14 years ago. And I know that Mark is

extremely proud of the Benevolent Fund, an endowment he started with his friend and mentor Dr Don Rix, to assist physicians in need, as well as student outreach programs that include the Student Bursary Fund. Mark has always felt the need to help people, and these programs have grown under his guidance.

Mark has made inroads on the national stage as well. He contributed greatly to the Canadian Medical Association's Health Care Transformation Strategy that is leading the efforts of the CMA to influence national health care policy. And his opinion in the CEOs/Presidents Forum, now an advisory body to the CMA Board of Directors, has been sought and highly considered.

I thank you Mark—as do all those you have touched, inspired, and influenced during your years at the BCMA. You leave the BCMA in great shape and ready to pursue the challenges ahead. I wish you well in your retirement and hope you will now have the time to pursue your many interests.

—Nasir Jetha, MD  
BCMA President



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