

My vision for the year is all about you

I write this a few short days after the BC Medical Association's Annual General Meeting held in Vancouver. It is there that I addressed attendees, outlining my goals for the year I will spend as president. This is something I think is important to share with all the doctors of BC, because you are the subject of my goals.

By now you have all received the referendum package on the physician Master Agreement that I am hoping you will ratify. As you are no doubt aware, reaching this agreement has taken years and a lot of hard work from many people. From the BCMA's perspective this agreement gets us through a time of austerity when governments everywhere aren't inclined to part with money. You just have to look at the troubles that physicians in Ontario are experiencing right now to be thankful that we have reached an agreement with our government. The bottom line is, this agreement respects the challenging fiscal climate in this province while protecting and maintaining the services and programs we know work so well for both physicians and patients.

Once this agreement has been ratified, my first priority as your president will be to work with the Board and BCMA staff to rebuild member confidence in our association. I plan to get out of Vancouver to visit as many communities in the province as possible, and I will listen to and discuss your concerns and from there determine a plan of action. I am very aware of the dissatisfaction among some specialties in BC, who believe that the BCMA does not have their best interests at heart. It can be very frustrating when the changes you want seem to take so long, but we must all play by the rules and work together to

solve our issues. The BCMA is committed to representing all doctors in a fair, balanced, and respectful way. And for all doctors to work together for the good of us all is something I truly believe in. The opportunity to meet with colleagues across the province is something I'm really looking forward to.

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As we've learned through the years, nothing ever stays the same—and change affects us all. It behooves us to anticipate change and be prepared for it. BC doctors have been looking for more value in their professional lives and for the ability to deliver better patient care, and this has initiated changes in how we deliver health care. Programs such as the General Practice Services Committee and the Specialist Services Committee provide resources and supports to make changes in care delivery that benefit both patients and physicians.

However, changes forced upon us—such as expanding scopes of practice for allied health care professionals such as pharmacists, naturopaths, midwives, nurse practitioners, and (if the Minister of Health has his way) nurse anesthetists—should be looked at skeptically in the interest of our patients. Part of our concern is that

these practitioners are leaning toward working in isolation or independently, instead of as part of a health care team. If we can work collaboratively with the best trained generalist—in most cases the general practitioner—as the team leader, then perhaps some of the pressures being experienced by physicians can be reduced and patients will continue receiving optimum care.

Some changes we know are coming, and we need to prepare for them. The demographics of our workforce are changing and the general, overarching, fragmented plan that has been in use isn't working—if we have shortages and physician burnout now, the future doesn't hold much hope. The BCMA has written a policy paper (“Doctors Today and Tomorrow,” found on the BCMA website) that addresses this issue, and I hope you will read it. The paper makes recommendations on future training, different community needs in the province, and the physician life cycle, from student to practising physician to retirement. The paper also looks at aligning physician resources with population needs. A potential solution would be to increase the number of government-funded residency spots. This would allow for re-entry and enhanced skills training for practising physicians, and allow many of our homegrown doctors in training now studying abroad to return home.

I believe we can accomplish a great deal when we work together, and I would love to be able to tell you one year from now that we are doing just that. As your president I am here to represent your interests, and I intend to remind you of that throughout the year.

—Shelley Ross, MD
BCMA President