

## Talking about the compensation reopener

**F**or many people, the new year is an opportunity for new beginnings, fresh starts, and hope for a happy, healthy, and prosperous year. For the physicians of BC it also means the start of negotiations of the compensation reopener.

The BCMA's executive director of negotiations, Paul Straszak, and his team are expected to begin talks with government in late spring. Now, you might be saying to yourself, "Didn't we just ratify a new 4-year deal back in July?" The answer is yes, you most definitely did. However, the 4-year Physician Master Agreement, due to expire 31 March 2016, covered just the first 2 years of compensation, leaving the last 2 years to be negotiated.

### We want to hear from you

Before any talks begin, the BCMA needs to hear from as many physician members as possible. It's important that we negotiate on issues that are important to you. One way you can share your priorities with us is by completing the electronic survey that was sent out in January. The BCMA worked with Ipsos Reid to develop a number of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The more physicians complete the survey, the more reflective our submission to government will be.



Mr Straszak has already met with the section leaders to discuss this round of negotiations, and I have traveled to many parts this province meeting with as many members as possible, and have often discussed negotiations during these sessions.

### The process

Once we are armed with all the necessary information we will begin the reopener process. This process includes up to four phases, each phase consisting of increasing involvement of outside assistance and increasing pressure on the parties to settle if they are unable to reach a negotiated agreement.

**Phase 1:** Starting in early June 2013, the BCMA negotiating team and government representatives will meet to exchange proposals and attempt to reach an agreement on the issues.

**Phase 2:** If we have not reached an agreement by the end of September 2013, the help of a mediator will be enlisted to assist in the discussions.

**Phase 3:** If we have still not reached a deal by the end of December 2013, a conciliation panel will convene and each party will make its argument and present its submission. The conciliation panel will then make its recommendations.

If negotiations reach this phase it is imperative that the negotiations team is able to secure the support of the conciliation panel. This means we must be very circumspect with our submission or we will find ourselves with very little. The panel is required to consider the province's fiscal situation, the medical and operational needs of the health authorities, and the need to provide reasonable compensation to physicians.

**Phase 4:** If government disagrees with the conciliation panel's recommendations, it has the right to reject the

panel's report and continue the negotiations with the BCMA negotiating team. If this occurs, BC physicians will have the right to withdraw services, subject to a determination as to the health and safety of patients by the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

### Scope of the reopener discussions

In establishing the ground rules for the reopener discussions, both sides agreed to limit the number of topics that would be discussed to primarily matters relating to compensation. Specifically, the topics are compensation, benefit plans, the Medical On-Call/Availability Program, funding for information technology, and unresolved issues from the Alternative Payments Committee mandate, as well as any other matter that applies to all physicians.

The reopener discussions were meant to be limited in scope, and any issues brought to our attention outside of the topics listed above will remain unaddressed until the Master Agreement renewal negotiation in 2016.

It's important to note that at the master negotiating table, the BCMA and government do not make decisions on specific fee items. Rather, the negotiating team will typically advocate for general increases to MSP fees and alternative payment rates or targeted blocks of funding.

We all hope for a smooth negotiating process, but with a government election just a few short weeks before negotiations are set to begin, it's impossible to anticipate what that process might look like. No matter what government factors come into play, the BCMA will be ready, willing, and able to start.

—Shelley Ross, MD  
President