

Working toward changing our governance model

Major changes are coming to our association. Governance changes.

When the subject of governance comes up in conversation, people's eyes usually glaze over. Many find it to be a boring topic, but as someone who has long been engaged in the activities of Doctors of BC I'm here to tell you that governance isn't only interesting, it's important!

So why should you care? Because the main responsibilities of Doctors of BC fall into three broad categories:

- Negotiating
- Influencing health care policy
- Advocating on behalf of physicians, patients, and the public

And here is the simple truth: Our ability to fulfill these responsibilities for you is based on the process by which we govern ourselves. The stronger the governance model, the stronger and better we'll be at representing you.

If we don't have the best structure and functions in place, we won't be able to do the best job.

I am writing about this topic now because we will soon be embarking on a consultative, iterative process to decide on some significant governance changes—changes including the best approach to reducing our Board size in a way that enables us to continue to represent your interests, regardless of where in BC you live and practise.

First, some background. A new Societies Act will be introduced this year. There will be a period of time before it comes into effect, but we anticipate a number of changes that will impact Doctors of BC. Under the new Act we will be required to amend and refile our bylaws, providing us the opportunity to modernize them—to make them more flexible,

to make them more user friendly, and to ensure they reflect the best governance practices.

This impending legislation, combined with the interest in our association's governance as seen through recent referenda, make this next year ideal for the Governance Committee and Board to reconsider the Doctors of

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BC structures and functions and introduce changes we feel are necessary.

And there is an appetite for change. In 2008 a major referendum provided two Board restructuring alternatives, that of the Board and a separate proposal put forth by two members. Although 72% of the votes were in favor of change, neither proposal received the required 75% approval. In 2013 another proposed change to Board structure was put forward, this time with only slightly more than 50% in favor. And the most recent restructuring referendum occurred last year when a proposal was put forth to decrease the number of District Delegates on the Board. Once again this proposal came close to succeeding, with a 65% vote in favor, yet fell short of the required 75% majority. (Note that this threshold is expected to decrease to a two-thirds majority under the new Societies Act.)

At the time you read this, there is a strong likelihood that there will be several more proposed bylaw changes in front of you for consideration. However, having individual bylaw proposals put forward is not, to my mind, the best way to proceed:

- First, proposals from individual members are often out of the overall context in how the association functions, so there can be unexpected consequences.
- Second, if there hasn't been good broad consultation with members prior to proposing changes, change through referendum really is change through ultimatum—take it or leave it.
- Third, one-off amendments interfere with the overall mandate, plan, and staff resources allocated for the association restructuring that we are currently undertaking.

At its meeting of 28 November the Board approved the Governance Committee's plan to modernize our association's structures and processes. This continues our discussion on reducing the size of our Board, yet retaining our ability to effectively represent you.

We will be doing this through a consultative, iterative process. We plan on posting a rough outline on our website by early fall asking you key questions and providing you the ability to give us feedback. We will take that feedback and incorporate it into the next version of the proposal, which will once again be posted on our website for further input.

It is our intent for this process to lead to a co-created model that would be ready for a referendum vote in approximately 1 year.

I'm not asking everyone to develop a passion for governance models and bylaw amendments. What I am asking is that you have your voice heard by providing feedback during this process. The stronger and better this process is, the stronger and better we as an organization will become.

—Bill Cavers, MD
Doctors of BC President