

Cut through the differences, grow visionary leaders

The value of strong leadership within the profession cannot be overemphasized. Given the challenges doctors face with tightening health care budgets, an aging population, and physician shortages, it is our patients, indeed society as a whole, who are looking to us—the medical profession—for meaningful and practical solutions. These challenges have grown steadily over a number of years, and they will not be solved overnight. But as a profession we have the influence, the education, and the ability to effectively lead the way to a better tomorrow. Often, starting at the local community or department level with a single initiative, as we did with the divisions of family practice and the medical staff associations, can prove to be the best course of action.

But what does it mean to be a physician leader? It's about more than just skill and experience. It's about taking rational risks, having a vision, and taking action to shape the future of health care. It's about stepping out of our day-by-day work; moving outside our comfort zone; and engaging with our colleagues, our health authorities, and often government, our communities, and our patients to drive innovation and positive change.

Some of the best leadership and the most significant and meaningful changes are those that begin at the grassroots. Take the example of ERAS, a project to Enhance Recovery After Surgery. A small group of doctors in the Interior of British Columbia, along with nurses, administrators, and allied health care providers, had a vision to implement a number of perioperative care pathways designed to achieve early recovery. Today, with the support of Doctors of BC and the Specialist Services Committee, they

have seen great success, and ERAS has expanded to 23 communities and significantly impacted hundreds of patients in 26 hospitals.

Engagement and collaboration are key elements to leadership. When we work together and put aside our individual differences, that's when change really happens. We have seen this in the work of our physician colleagues and leaders in the divisions of family practice across the province. Their grassroots work in communities around BC has supported such things as the creation of more team-based practice models, local recruitment and retention efforts, and the introduction of new business practices, enabling doctors to effectively take on more patients. We have also seen physician leaders within our hospitals work hard to develop the medical staff associations—first-of-their-kind initiatives that enable our facilities-based physicians, many of whom are specialists, to have a stronger voice in decision making in their health authorities. Leadership is about being willing to sit down, listen, and work with others to cut through our differences and come to a mutual understanding and a positive solution.

Leaders have a strong desire to teach and mentor, to pass along what they have learned, and inspire the next generation. And all young doctors—our potential future leaders—who are just beginning their careers would benefit from having a mentor, someone to advise them, someone to look up to. Each one of us has our own unique story that tells how we got to where we are today, who impacted us along the way, and what lessons we have learned. By sharing our experiences and demonstrating our leadership, we will be providing the same guidance and mentorship to our doc-

tors of tomorrow. We will be setting an example for other doctors, while helping our young colleagues build a foundation as they embark on their careers.

In our recently released *2015–16 Annual Report*, you will find profiles on five energetic, passionate, and visionary physician leaders in BC (doctorsofbc.ca/who-we-are/annual-report). They tell their stories of what inspires them and the role leadership plays.

I was particularly moved by the words of Dr Arun Jagdeo, a fourth-year psychiatry resident, already a leader and working to change the world. He perceives physicians' work as a calling, not just a job, and says, "I see physicians as healers, not mere service providers, and, as such, I view us as persons who hold a great deal of power. As a profession, medicine has offered me a great many opportunities for personal growth and to contribute to society, and, in return, I'm compelled to help make our profession the symbol for all that is good in the world."

Thank you to all our physician leaders—those known and those as yet unrecognized—for your time, energy, dedication, and commitment to your patients, communities, and to our profession.

—Alan Ruddiman, MBBCh,
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Doctors of BC President

Drop me a line

Do you know any physician leaders? If so, drop me a line at president@doctorsofbc.ca and we may feature them in future articles.