



Strength in numbers: The power of cooperation

“We must use collegiality not to level people down, but to bring together their strength and creativity.” —Andy Hargreaves

As my year as Doctors of BC President reaches the halfway mark, I am reflecting on my mandate to date. In my inauguration speech, I spoke about leadership, professional culture, connectivity, change in our rapidly evolving world, and the need for courage. I am committed to supporting and building courage in physicians across our province. This courage enables them to lead the changes our health care system needs to be both comprehensive and sustainable moving into the future. To meet these goals I outlined back in June, I have been traveling across the province to begin to understand how my colleagues are defining, meeting, and resolving these challenging issues, and learning how Doctors of BC can support their work.

Those of us who have traveled, volunteered, or worked abroad understand that traveling and sharing experiences changes who we are at a fundamental level that can be hard to define. We understand that listening to stories and attempting to understand the experiences of others is transformative and goes a long way toward breaking down barriers. There is much we can glean through exposure to different methods of studying, coping, and ultimately addressing problems.

Being invited to attend local meetings with grassroots physicians and Doctors of BC staff who provide local support has been transformative for me personally. I have gained an amazing amount of direct knowledge in my engagement work, but what has been most striking to me is the power of collegiality, particularly in smaller communities. Our personal life experiences and (often unconscious) biases alter our interpretation of what we learn from every new encounter. In fact, people will often leave meetings with

very different interpretations of the same events. Maintaining and fostering this sense of professionalism and collegiality becomes even more crucial in this context.

When I sat down to write this column, I reflected on how I could best define *collegiality*. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the word *colleague* as, “an associate or co-worker typically in a profession or in a civil or ecclesiastical office and often of similar rank or state: a fellow worker or professional.” I would suggest that the active definition of collegiality encompasses much, much more and includes the principles of respect, commitment to moral principles, and valuing the work of others. Collegiality builds trust. If we can respect each other’s work, viewpoints, and ideas, we can cooperate and provide the support needed to make necessary changes. If we are all committed to the same basic moral principles and values as physicians, and we understand the goals of our health care system, it makes it easier to work as a team where everyone is valued. Our shared commitment to understanding each other’s perspectives gives us the power to lead change.

I have witnessed firsthand the incredible collegiality of our colleagues across the province, as they truly value the professional skills they each bring to the table. I have seen their devotion to solving local issues in a way that supports, rather than tears down relationships across specialities, as they build processes that improve both the individual’s working life and

patient access to quality care. I have noticed the positive impact on relationships with our governing bodies, allied health, and public not-for-profits in improving on-the-ground resources and access to care.

I would like to challenge you all to take a moment, look at the work your colleagues do every day, and ask, “What can I do in my work that will improve the day-to-day work of my colleagues and foster a better system for all of us?” If you see nothing, then I encourage you to reach out and ask, as you may in fact not have the full picture.

There is no room for empire building or ego in this type of collegial work.

No matter how you as an individual apply the professional skills you have acquired to date, we are all an invaluable part of a much greater whole. There is power in supporting each other, and exploring new ways to deliver care that we simply cannot achieve working in silos. We are truly Better Together. ■

—Kathleen Ross, MD
Doctors of BC President

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