



Greetings from my family to yours

In my first words to you as president, I want to reflect on some of the things I am grateful for, acknowledge the challenges of the past year, and cast our eyes forward to 2021, where anything is possible.

First off, gratitude. I am grateful to live in this beautiful province we call BC, and I am grateful to the Indigenous peoples, for it is upon their ancient and unceded lands we all live, work, and play. I am grateful to live in Canada, a democratic country in which elections are largely a subdued affair, the timing of which may be contested, but not the results.

I am grateful for our colleagues in public health, especially Dr Bonnie Henry, her deputies and advisors, public servants, medical health officers, deputy medical health officers, and all others involved in making crucial decisions about our pandemic response. To adapt the famous words spoken by Winston Churchill during a dark hour in World War II, never in a global crisis has so much been owed by so many to so few. I am grateful to our political leaders for their willingness to share the stage with scientific experts, which stands in great and tragic contrast to other jurisdictions in the world. I am grateful for all essential workers, including delivery drivers, grocery workers, hydro crews, and sanitation workers who help us maintain one of the highest standards of living in the world despite some of the chaos around us. And I am grateful to all of you, my colleagues, who demonstrate every day what it is to be brave, to be innovative, to be compassionate, to be doctors in the time of COVID-19.

This pandemic began with frightening images from Wuhan, China; northern Italy; and New York. Field hospitals, morgues, and testing stations were quickly assembled to cope with the

anticipated surge of ill people. Surgeries were canceled. Offices were closed. We moved to virtual care seemingly overnight. Everything changed.

And while the surge may not have materialized to the extent we anticipated, we still had to deal with the fallout. We rationed gloves and masks as supplies dwindled. We rapidly adapted our offices to see patients safely in person. We ramped up surgical and diagnostic capacity as much as we could while donning and doffing bulky personal protective equipment and working in facilities designed for throughput, not physical distancing. We innovated to deliver critical preventive care such as influenza vaccinations. We girded ourselves to deal with increased mental health and substance use concerns as we also looked after our own well-being.

And lastly, while 2020 has been difficult, I know that you have been giving it your all for months without reprieve. I know that many of you are likely feeling exhausted if not teetering on burnout. But I also know that despite this, on any given day, at any given moment, you are out there crushing it 100%.

As we cross into 2021, COVID-19 will still be with us, but I remain optimistic for many reasons. Our understanding of this virus has evolved quickly, more quickly than for any human pathogen that has come before it. Massive global efforts are underway to develop new tests, treatments, and vaccines. Canadian industry has responded to the urgent call to produce critical supplies such as personal protective equipment and ventilators. We have made more advances

in virtual care over the past 9 months than in the previous 9 years.

There is one more reason for my optimism. I know that this virus, no matter how many people it impacts, no matter what new obstacles it presents, cannot overcome all of us at once. There is always someone we can lean on, who can listen to our sorrow and who can build us back up. When you are feeling good, be that person to someone who is struggling. When you are feeling down, let that energized person into your

life. We will all play these roles for one another in the coming months.

We face a choice as 2021 quickly approaches. Do we allow this virus to define us, or to divide us? Will we allow it to destroy our bonds with our fellow human beings? Or do we take stock of what is important, remember what we have rather than the little that we don't, reach out to someone who is struggling, and go bravely forward with renewed focus?

I choose to concentrate on the latter—to focus on the positives that have emerged throughout this year, as hard as they may be to see at times—and to take advantage of the opportunities that have resulted from these challenging times. We are living history, but indeed we live. And we find ways to thrive.

I wish the best of the season to each of you. May you find time to unwind, recoup, and re-energize. ■

—Matthew C. Chow, MD
Doctors of BC President

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