



The door is open: Diversity and inclusion at Doctors of BC

As president of Doctors of BC, I receive and respond to a variety of questions from our members. I recently received a letter regarding medical school selection committee processes and the possibility of those processes being used to address downstream human resources issues. The letter reinforced for me the reasons why Doctors of BC prioritized work to examine and move forward in its diversity and inclusion processes last year.

We as a profession, and the health care system as a whole, can greatly benefit from having a diverse membership, but we need to be bold and willing to step out of our comfort zone. While we physicians are similar in many ways, there is value in seeking out the areas that make us different. There is power in diversity: every voice and every perspective has value. We know the world itself continues to change, as it has done for millennia, and maintaining the status quo has never been the answer—it certainly won't address any of our current or downstream dilemmas.

Over the last year, Doctors of BC undertook a substantive and independent diversity and inclusion engagement and review process. Our Board understood that to build a stronger and truly representative organization for physicians across the province we needed to review our foundational processes. We needed to ensure that all our members have the opportunity to share their individual skills and knowledge in a way that strengthens our organization. The Diversity and Inclusion Barrier Assessment report was released to the membership in November 2019.

Through this comprehensive process, we learned that our diversity and inclusion challenges are similar to those of many other organizations. And, while we understood upon

entering this process that every aspect of medicine is important, and that every perspective has value, barriers were perceived by members. Those barriers, including those for women, younger physicians, and members from different cultures and backgrounds, have kept some from participating in our committees, Representative Assembly, and Board. If we believe that there is a varied richness of experience and perspectives in our diverse membership that would benefit our organization, then we should ensure members see themselves reflected in their leadership and advisory structures. We are, after all, Better Together.

The Board has reviewed the Barrier Assessment report, which makes more than 50 recommendations, and accepted them all in principle, with the understanding that several require feasibility studies. We are developing a roadmap for the short-, medium-, and longer-term items, ensuring transparency for our members. An important initial step to clearly understand the diversity of our members will be collecting richer demographic data as part of our membership renewal process, likely in the 2021 renewal cycle.

Understanding the inner workings of any organization is a crucial step for anybody who wants to get involved. Many of our surveyed members stated they did not have a clear understanding of Doctors of BC's structures and processes. It is obvious, then, that working to improve member awareness of opportunities to participate within Doctors of BC could in turn improve representation.

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We have some work ahead of us, both in the long term and in the short term. As a first step, we will be making it far more clear what types of committees we have and why they are important; the process to successfully apply

for positions and what skills might be required; and the commitment required in terms of prep time, meeting attendance, and expected outcomes of committee work. As well, we need to do a better job

of letting members know of vacant committee positions beyond the usual call for applicants.

Later steps will include looking at a number of options suggested by members to address identified barriers to participation, including travel costs, loss of clinical days, child care, and remote meeting technology. Also, we will look into developing and promoting leadership training opportunities, including mentoring and onboarding new committee members to ensure they feel welcome in meetings. We can explore reporting mechanisms for harassment or bullying behaviors, if encountered, along with educational resources to address any reported instances.

Doctors of BC is committed to showing all members that our door is open. Our overarching goal is to ensure our governance structures reflect the diversity of our members and include all voices. Together, we can work toward solutions for all the issues facing our profession. Success is a shared responsibility; we will continue to do our part as we know you are doing yours. ■

—Kathleen Ross, MD
Doctors of BC President