



Keeping you informed during negotiations

As I write this at the end of April, our province is facing a surge of COVID-19 cases. My neighborhood has been designated a high-transmission community, and I have been encouraging, cajoling, and even pleading with all my neighbors to get vaccinated. Perhaps shouting, “Get your shot!” out my car window to pedestrians was a bit much, but perhaps not. While I cannot claim any prescient ability, what I do know is that doctors—wherever you are and whatever you do—will have given your very best and fought hard for your patients. I, and every person in this province, thank you for this.

And now turning to something different: negotiations. The 2019–2022 Physician Master Agreement between Doctors of BC and the government will end on 31 March 2022. Formal negotiations for our next agreement begin in June.

In the past, members have said they want to be better informed as we go through the process, which we will do to the best of our ability. Doctors of BC and the government have agreed not to speak publicly about our bargaining positions, the status of negotiations, and how talks are going. This is not unusual—bargaining that takes place in the public domain often signals a serious problem. Still, we know you want to understand what is going on and how it will affect you.

To this end, we will be more proactive about communicating with members during the negotiations process, within the limits of bargaining rules. This will be a multiphased approach. We are currently in phase one, our lead-up to and moving through formal negotiations. Our goal during this stage, which could last up to a year, is to keep members informed of

the steps in preparing for and conducting the PMA negotiations.

We have reached out to members in numerous ways to determine your key priorities. These have included our negotiations survey, meetings with the sections and other physician groups, Zoom webinars, and a Representative Assembly workshop.

Among a number of priorities important to you, which will be brought to the table, are two specific ones that were shared by a large majority of members: addressing the continually increasing cost of running a practice and the funding and provision of virtual services on a permanent basis. These, among others, will be considered by the Board as it sets the mandate for the PMA negotiations.

While we are in negotiations, public opinion is important because it will affect government priorities. We will continue to promote the value doctors bring to the health care system, their patients, and communities, and the effects of a shortage of doctors in several critical areas. During this pandemic year, we are able to talk about how doctors showed leadership provincially and in their communities, how quickly doctors were able to pivot to virtual care, and the invaluable contribution of doctors to maintaining capacity within the health care system.

Our negotiations communications to members will mostly be via the *In Circulation* electronic newsletter. For those who have not yet signed up for it, I encourage you to do so at www.doctorsofbc.ca/account/subscriptions (log in required). There is now a special section titled

Negotiations Update, which will include as much information as we are able to disclose and that will be updated regularly.

Phases two and three of negotiations will come into play if phase one is not successful. We would move into mediation and potentially into conciliation, which ends with the release of a report from a neutral conciliator. This is where we take the public foundation we have built and increase it, along with a number of other possible measures. We have not had to do this in recent times, but it

will come as no surprise to you that we expect a challenging negotiation given the general state of society as it emerges from the pandemic.

Bottom line, we want our communications to you to demonstrate that you are being heard, that we understand your concerns, and that the negotiations team is doing its best to take your requests into account. ■

—**Matthew C. Chow, MD**
Doctors of BC President

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