



Looking to 2021 with hope and optimism

In my basement I keep a relic from another age: an instrument of the Great War. Stamped in its aging metal is the year it was made: 1918. That year has special significance. It was the year in which the world last faced a pandemic of such sweeping proportions as to leave no person untouched; 500 million were infected, tens of millions died.

The world has changed a lot since then. We now have the Internet, molecular biology, modern public health, and mRNA vaccines. In 1918, men around the world were engaged in war and

there was little left to fight a pandemic. In 2020, women and men around the world are leading us in peace—our collective efforts are focused on fighting the pandemic, not each other.

It's outstanding what incredible things humanity can achieve when we aren't using our resources to fight each other—when we come together for the collective good. So it's little wonder that COVID-19 vaccines (vaccines *plural*) have been developed in record time. A whole bonanza of them actually. In Canada we are starting with two, but globally more are on their way. I am confident they will be manufactured and distributed in record time as well. As is normal, there will be some hiccups. Supply chains will be tested. Geopolitics will get in the way. Vaccine nationalism will rear its head. Physicians and our health care partners will face a task of monumental proportions. But the job will get done, I am sure of that.

Our 2020 flu shot campaign was a dress rehearsal for the big show. We experienced challenges—communication could have been better, some innovative ideas encountered resistance, we experienced supply issues—but we overcame them and we learned from them. And when all was said and done, a record number of shots were administered in record time. Physicians were front and centre in that effort, from planning to execution.

And we will show up for the COVID-19 vaccination campaign too. We will be there to receive the vaccine in phases, putting evidence and patients first while supplies remain

tight. Then we will be the ones to give the vaccine, marking the beginning of the end of this pandemic. We will use our knowledge and our experience from countless past vaccination campaigns. We will leverage our relationships with our patients and our communities to combat fear, misinformation, and ignorance. Once again, we will be front and centre.

It is not lost on me that the Canadian Armed Forces, having served valiantly in the 1918 war, is now using its logistical and technical might to support the provision of COVID-19 vaccines to all corners of the country. It is also not lost on me that women, who were struggling to achieve suffrage across Canada (and indeed much of the world) in 1918, are now some of our most cherished and respected leaders. Women are leading our pandemic response from the BC Provincial Health Office to the Public Health Agency of Canada to the federal Ministry of Health. They are also leading in nations around the world.

A lot has changed since 1918. Not everything, and some things are taking too long. But our ability to create and distribute a pandemic vaccine in record time, and the work of each and every one of you, my colleagues, give me reasons to look to 2021 with hope and optimism. ■

—Matthew C. Chow, MD
Doctors of BC President

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President's Comment: Greetings from my family to yours. 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.

Read the article: bcmj.org/presidents-comment-covid-19/greetings-my-family-yours

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