

## Improving the BCMA election process with e-voting

**E**arly in February, your Board of Directors debated proposals to implement electronic voting (sometimes referred to as e-voting) and to consider the formation of an election oversight committee. After a vigorous debate on some of the issues, the latter motion was ruled out of order, but the newly formed Internal Governance Subcommittee (of the statutory Governance and Nominations Committee) will report back to the Board with recommendations on both matters.

This will be the first election in which the BCMA will provide nomination forms online, making them more accessible and saving the Association an estimated \$10 000 in mailing costs and considerable staff time.

We can learn from others' experience. For instance, the 38 000-member American Psychiatric Association has published specific election guidelines ([www.psych.org/Resources/Governance/Elections/Election-Guidelines.aspx](http://www.psych.org/Resources/Governance/Elections/Election-Guidelines.aspx)) for candidates and their supporters in the 2011 election. In 2000 their board established six election principles (posted at [www.bcmj.org](http://www.bcmj.org) for your reference) to promote fairness and a level playing field.

A growing number of associations, credit unions, universities, and school boards in North America, indeed worldwide, are now using electronic voting and result tabulation for their board of directors' elections. As well, Canada (Ontario), France, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the UK have each used, to some degree, Internet voting for voters in municipal elections and as a means to "take the ballot box to the voter."

It is essential to pay attention to security, confidentiality, and privacy issues. There are some obvious fiscal

benefits of e-voting: saving the costs of mailing, eliminating the need to print thousands of copies of various documents, and greatly reducing paper and envelope purchases. E-voting is environmentally friendly, will flag ballot errors (such as choosing too many candidates), eliminate spoiled ballots, and have security mechanisms to allow only one vote per member. It will also create an easy mechanism for voting at times other than the annual election for Board business and for any referendum. An acceptable system will ensure voter anonymity and prevent fraud, although the latter is a risk in both manual and electronic voting systems.

Would voter turnout increase with e-voting? Actions and activities that lead to a more involved membership are good, as long as there is equitable access to information and voting for all members. A successful transition will continue to mail out paper ballots and a personal identification number, giving each voter a choice between e-voting or using a mailed ballot to vote.

To make an informed vote the membership needs information about the candidates. During the past year the new process used to select committee members appears to be working well and, as a bonus, we have had many excellent applications from individuals not previously involved in the BCMA. When a position is announced, candidates are invited to submit a statement of interest and relevant experience, combined with a disclosure of any potential conflict of interest. Applications received are reviewed by the Governance and Nominations Committee and short-listed candidates may be interviewed before a recommendation is made to the Board.

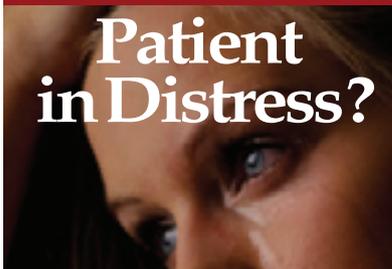
The annual election for the offi-

cers of the Association and directors would do well to modify its nomination forms to include similar content. Providing this information online makes it readily accessible during the voting process.

Clearly, however we improve our election process, your Board of Directors will be need to make some thoughtful decisions about election guidelines before we implement the technology in a reliable, secure, and effective way for our membership. Your input, by way of your elected directors, or directly to me, is most welcome as we develop better process and protocol for elections.

—Ian Gillespie, MD  
BCMA President

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