



The President's Letter

Dr. Noel W. Grisdale

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Dear Member:

Tonight the Alberta Medical Association (AMA) finishes its seven-city tour and three videoconferences to review the tentative three-year fiscal agreement between the AMA, Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Health Services.

Here are excerpts from the speaking notes for President-Elect Dr. Christopher J. (Chip) Doig and myself. Other speakers reviewed in detail the proposed agreement, implementation issues and allocation, as well as medical staff bylaws (even though these are not part of the tentative agreement).

Tentative agreement

Just before Christmas, on Saturday, December 13, the Representative Forum (RF) held a special meeting in Edmonton to assess the tentative agreement. Following unanimous endorsement by the RF delegates, the Board of Directors sent the proposed agreement for ratification, with a recommendation to accept.

Both the Board of Directors and the Representative Forum agreed that the tentative agreement stands on its own merits.

But if you need to put it into perspective, the most obvious picture involves the price of oil. It was in the \$100 range when we finalized the letter of understanding. Now it is around \$38-\$45.

Given the government's financial predicament, let me be very clear about one thing:

- This is the very best offer that physicians will get right now.

If the agreement is rejected, we don't just pick up where we left off. It is back to zero, right back to the beginning. And I have no doubt that, whatever government offers next, it will be considerably less than what is before you today.

About allocation

In the last ratification vote, some AMA members pressed for information about the allocation. At the time we were unable to provide the data. However, this time we do have some numbers to share.

(Please note: Allocation information was made available on the AMA website January 5. Log in with your member number and password at <http://www.albertadoctors.org>, go to the Fees and Negotiations tab, then click on Allocation in the drop-down menu.)

I must remind you, and emphasize, that allocation is not solely up to the AMA. Government and Alberta Health Services each have a voice. Furthermore, please remember that increases to the Schedule of Medical Benefits and to alternate relationship plans are only part of the financial picture.

In addition to those increases, all the programs are continuing and there are higher benefits in a number of them. We have also secured new, additional funding to support physicians who have to change their EMRs.

Looking ahead

If you and the other members of the AMA approve the tentative agreement, the next job is implementing it.

Five items that will take time and resources are:

1. Allocation – for the current round (April 1, 2008; April 1, 2009) and, beginning next month, for April 1, 2010.
2. A proposal for the future of the Physician Office System Program.
3. Designing the Performance and Diligence Indicator Fund for family physicians; or, if the timelines are not met, deciding what to do with the money instead.
4. Studying of the costs for physicians to comply with the new infection prevention and control standards.
5. Assessing the impact on community practices from the payment rules for urgent care centres and advanced ambulatory care centres.

Then there is Negotiations 2011. Both this fiscal agreement and the master agreement expire March 31, 2011. That means that there is a tremendous amount of work to be done.

Negotiations 2011 underlines the importance of everything that we do and everything that we accomplish in the coming months. Success will be dependent on the environment that we create.

For example, our relationship with Alberta Health and Wellness is obviously important, but our relationship with Alberta Health Services could well prove to be an even more important driver for Negotiations 2011.

- How will Alberta Health Services engage physicians?
- What role will the Council of Presidents create for itself?
- What type of new relationship might the AMA and the council form for regional medical organizations? It could result in changes to the AMA's structure.

A new, single set of province-wide medical staff bylaws could become the symbol for the relationship between Alberta Health Services, the AMA and Alberta physicians.

With the AMA's encouragement, the Council of Presidents is leading the profession's review of any proposed new bylaws. Another draft of the bylaws is expected later this month, and the council plans to communicate broadly with physicians.

All this activity, from the tentative agreement to bylaws and beyond, should allow us to work productively on many important issues that are facing the system. With all the changes occurring now and coming in the future, this is an opportunity for organized medicine to have input and to promote a system that puts Patients First®.

So as you can see, there is much to do. Negotiations are not single events. Rather they are a continuum of:

- Planning
- Negotiating
- Ratifying
- Implementing
- And beginning the cycle again

In closing, I encourage you to vote in favor of the proposed agreement and to encourage others to do likewise.

Your ballot must be received at the AMA **by 4 p.m., Monday, January 26**. If you have not yet received your ballot or have any questions about the voting process, please let me know so Executive Office can follow up in a timely fashion.

Thanks to those who have come out to the Negotiations Tour meetings, attended videoconferences, called and emailed. Your support and input, and indeed the support of the whole profession during these negotiations, has been very important.

I will share the voting results on January 27 as soon as it is possible to do so.

Yours truly,

Noel W. Grisdale, MD, CCFP
President