

# The President's Letter

Dr. Darryl D. LaBuick



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September 16, 2008

Dear Member:

With the changing health care landscape in the province, the Alberta Medical Association (AMA) is active on a number of fronts from the trilateral agreement, medical staff bylaws and medical staff organizations to the role of physicians, local decision-making and physicians' ability to provide care to our patients.

The fall meeting of the Representative Forum (RF) this weekend at the Sutton Place Hotel in Edmonton will feature a 90-minute session on the relationship between physicians and Alberta Health Services (8:30 a.m. Saturday).

On September 4 the AMA convened a meeting of regional medical organization (RMO) presidents or designates. A major outcome was the decision to recommend a Council of Presidents with representation based on the boundaries that existed with the nine regional health authorities (RHAs).

With the abolition of the nine RHAs, district medical associations (DMAs) appear to be the logical successor. All physicians will be encouraged to join their DMA, and the AMA is considering providing administrative and financial support along the lines provided to sections.

The meeting also:

Provided feedback on the proposed medical administrative structure being developed by AHS and on a new, single set of provincial medical staff bylaws, where the AMA has representatives on the task force.

- Endorsed "Principles to Guide Physician Relationships with Alberta Health Services," which the Board of Directors approved at its July 17-18 meeting. The principles address (i) Alberta Health Services – physicians (ii) district medical associations and the AMA, and (iii) the trilateral agreement.

The principles – which will go before RF – reflect members' interests about how AHS will affect them and the profession, physician input, the trilateral initiatives and negotiations.

They also reflect the AMA's long-standing view that a successful health care system will have a provincial framework, but this framework will be balanced by local flexibility where physicians, other health care professionals and providers, and facilities deliver the care that Albertans need.

These principles provide a map for engaging physicians and opportunities for doing so, as well as for a robust relationship between the Alberta Government, Alberta Health Services and the Alberta Medical Association. They have provided direction for me and AMA senior staff in our dealings with government and AHS.

In addition, we have met with Health and Wellness Minister Ron Liepert, with the leadership of the AHS board and with the McKinsey consultants undertaking a study of the health care system.

Of course, the catalyst for this new environment is the Alberta Government's decision to replace the nine regional health authorities, the cancer and mental boards, and Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission with a new single board, Alberta Health Services.

We do not want a return to the mindset that drove the government in the early 1990s to slash the health care budget, to disenfranchise and marginalize physicians, and to not recognize us for what we do and contribute.

As you will recall, this generated enormous mistrust within the medical profession, undermined patient care and led to vigorous advocacy by the Alberta Medical Association with campaigns such as *Tell Us Where It Hurts*.

The trilateral agreement is the latest iteration of a relationship with government that stretches back before Medicare. As I referenced in some detail in my June 4 *President's Letter*, the AMA sees opportunity in the minister's new approach and in the department's 2008-11 business plan.

We are prepared to explore a new accord with both Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Health Services that will take delivery and accountability to a new level.

The history of health care shows that it is impossible to organize an efficient and effective system without the expertise of physicians and without the buy-in from physicians. The fundamental question for both the government and AHS is: "What type of relationship do you want with organized medicine?"

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The priority of the health care system must always be our patients, who deserve timely access and quality care. Physicians' support for Alberta Health Services will be determined by its ability to help us make a difference in providing care and in putting Patients First®.

Yours truly,

Darryl D. LaBuick, MD, CCFP  
President