



The President's Letter

Dr. Christopher J. (Chip) Doig

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October 22, 2009

Dear Member:

Premier Ed Stelmach has proposed a two-year voluntary freeze on fees/wages by physicians, nurses, teachers and public sector employees.

What will be the outcome of the premier's proposal for physicians? This is unclear, especially given that we only recently completed an agreement and will shortly have to commence negotiations on another.

The Alberta Medical Association's (AMA's) constitution, however, makes it very clear that it is the AMA membership in a province-wide vote, not the Representative Forum or Board of Directors, who would make a decision if one needs to be made.

Under "Referenda," Section 38.1 of the AMA's constitution and bylaws states:

"No agreement between Alberta Health and Wellness (or other paying agency) and the Association which affects the medical profession in Alberta shall be approved, adopted or ratified by the (Representative) Forum, the Board or the Executive on behalf of the Members unless such approval, adoption or ratification shall have been approved by a simple majority of the Members who vote on a ballot put to all Members entitled to vote."

For over a year, the AMA has been suggesting to government and Alberta Health Services (AHS) that informal discussion begin in relation to our agreement which expires on March 31, 2011. An early start would assist in establishing a common set of objectives and proposals that respect the needs of all parties.

Under the trilateral master agreement, Article 11.2 states: "Any Party to this Master Agreement may, not less than twelve (12) months or more than eighteen (18) months before the 31st day of March, 2011 open for renegotiation all matters or issues of any kind." We are now in that time frame.

As Albertans and as physicians, we do not under-estimate the province's current financial situation. We are prepared to negotiate a new agreement in good faith, to explore efficiencies that can be achieved in how services are delivered, and to promote levels and mix of service utilization that are effective. In other words, Patients First®.

Physicians' concerns about their lack of engagement by Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW) in the transformation of the province's health care system have caught the ear of Health and Wellness Minister Ron Liepert.

To his credit, at a meeting earlier this week the minister has proposed a high-level approach to improve physician engagement. The first choice for physicians and for the AMA is always collaborative problem-solving, as shown by our presentation to the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health this week.

Pandemic planning

Physician interest in, and concern about, H1N1 was demonstrated at the fall Representative Forum (RF). A scheduled 45-minute panel with Dr. André Corriveau, the province's Chief Medical Officer of Health, and with Dr. David Megran (Senior Physician Executive for AHS, and an infectious disease specialist) turned into a 90-minute session as RF delegates sought answers and offered feedback.

With the media daily reporting on H1N1, and patients and physicians alike looking for clarity and direction, the AMA continues to meet with AHS and AHW regarding payment for physicians working in a pandemic response plan.

There has been some confusion about the pandemic payment plan for physicians in light of the announcement by the minister on details of an AHW pandemic payment plan, as compared to pandemic payment plan details announced in the August 14 *President's Letter*.

To clear up this confusion, the AMA and the minister note that:

1. The provisions announced by the minister are to cover many situations, but not all.
2. In particular, if a severe pandemic does occur then the provisions outlined in the August 14 *President's Letter* will be used as necessary.
3. The conditions of using the various elements remain to be developed – this is a priority to be worked out with the AMA.
4. The aim in the next while is to have an understanding between AHW and AMA on all the major components of the program and the conditions of the use of its various components.

We will continue to keep physicians informed on all these matters.

Yours truly,

Christopher J. (Chip) Doig, MD, MSc, FRCPC
President