

# The President's Letter

*Dr. Brendan J. Bunting*



August 10, 2004

Dear Member:

## **CMA General Council**

Three strategic sessions – access and wait times; health human resources; and sustainability – are on the agenda when the Canadian Medical Association's (CMA's) General Council meets August 15-18 in Toronto. The Alberta Medical Association (AMA) will have 20 delegates; the three Alberta members on the CMA Board of Directors are also delegates.

Following last fall's election among AMA members, Dr. Ruth L. Collins-Nakai, an Edmonton pediatric cardiologist and an AMA past president, is our nominee to be the CMA's 2004-05 president-elect. The 2005 General Council will be in Edmonton August 14-17.

This year we will also celebrate the recognition being given to Dr. D. Lorne J. Tyrrell, the former dean of medicine and dentistry at the University of Alberta. He is this year's recipient of the FNG Starr Award, which is the highest honor the CMA can bestow on one of its members. Dr. Tyrrell is being recognized for a distinguished career and outstanding achievements both nationally and internationally. Patients have benefited from his leading-edge clinical care and the population-at-large from his research, medical education and advocacy.

## **2004-05 business plan**

At its July 22-23 meeting, the Board of Directors approved the 2004-05 business plan with an operating budget of \$9.84 million – and a dues increase of 1.5%. For the Full Member category, which is the largest, AMA dues will increase by \$19.22 to \$1,299.59 from \$1,280.37. For 2004-05, dues, including GST and CMA, are expected to total \$1,723.56 compared to \$1,690 this year. The increase does not apply to student and post-graduate members' dues.

The 1.5% increase reflects the projected annual rate of inflation. It is required to maintain base-level operations and to achieve the action items identified in the business plan, including special attention to improve honoraria for members serving on AMA committees, the Representative Forum and the board.

The business plan is built around (a) the AMA's mission statement to stand "as an advocate for its physician members, providing leadership and support for their role in the provision of quality health care" and (b) the roles of physicians:

- Medical expert and healer
- Professional
- Communicator
- Scholar
- Collaborator
- Advocate
- Manager

The plan also identifies three key result areas for the organization: governance, executive performance and quality. Highlights of the business plan will be posted on the AMA's website in the fall.

### **Trilateral agreement**

Successful implementation of the eight-year trilateral agreement with Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta's regional health authorities (RHAs) not only requires direction and oversight by the AMA Board of Directors but also the development of new policies and liaison with the AMA's representatives to the six committees. At its July meeting, the board met with AMA representatives on the Physician Services Committee and the Physician On Call Committee, and it endorsed three new policies:

- Adding physician groups to the master agreement
- Physician payment for referral from non-physicians
- Consensus supplements to physicians paid from the physician services budget

Dr. Daniel J. Hryciuk, the AMA co-chair of the Physician Services Committee, helped the board to understand the options and policy implications around surcharges. The two other AMA representatives are Dr. D. Glenn Comm and Verlin R. Gwin, Assistant Executive Director (Health Policy and Economics).

Our representatives to the Physician On Call Committee (Dr. David P. O'Neil, Dr. Brian J. Wirzba and Senior Economist Patrick J. Melia) are dealing with a number of issues including:

- (i) remuneration equity for rural general practitioners with special skills
- (ii) concerns by two sections regarding the design of the Physician On Call Program
- (iii) how the on-call program may be linked to the Primary Care Initiative Program
- (iv) the long-term sustainability of the program itself

The issue of sustainability arises because regional health authorities and physicians continue to propose more and more on-call programs. As a result, new funding is used to pay for these programs and rates remain frozen. Indeed, there is even the future possibility of rates decreasing in order to accommodate new programs. There is also the problem of inflation eroding the value of the current rates, thus making the programs less attractive to physicians.

### **Focusing on the future**

The Board of Directors, working with the Representative Forum, is committed to a longer-term outlook so that the AMA can continue to meet the needs of members and can take advantage of opportunities in the ever-changing health care environment. Two key areas are computerized health care and improved management of physicians' practices.

The board has set up the Practice Management Program (PMP) Strategy Task Force. Among its objectives are to "identify and evaluate potential opportunities to enhance the delivery, products and services" of the AMA's Practice Management Program and to develop the business model for PMP. Board members Dr. Christopher G.M. Evans and Dr. Gerhard N. Kiefer and Committee on Financial Audit member Dr. Daniel J. O'Connor will work with senior staff to produce an interim report by December and a final report by September 2005.

The Information Management/Information Technology Task Force is to identify "strategic 'areas of focus' that could be pursued exclusively by the AMA or by the AMA in partnership with others" and also identify "tactical initiatives" to achieve this. Board members are Dr. T. Malcolm Campbell and myself, along with IM/IT Coordinating Committee members Dr. W.W. (Bill) Anderson, Dr. Fraser W. Armstrong, Dr. June S. Bergman and Dr. Steven M. Edworthy, with assistance from senior staff.

### **2004-05 AMA president-elect**

I want to congratulate Dr. Tzu-Kuang (TK) Lee on his election as the 2004-05 president-elect of the Alberta Medical Association. An Edmonton internist, Dr. Lee is a valued member of the board and has served the profession in a number of ways including being a member of the Representative Forum and a past president of the Capital Regional Medical Organization. He will follow Dr. Jane E. Ballantine, who becomes president at the close of the Representative Forum in Calgary September 11.

Sincerely,

Brendan J. Bunting, MB, BCh, BAO  
President