



The President's Letter

Dr. Darryl D. LaBuick



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July 24, 2008

Dear Member:

Negotiations 2008

As you will recall, the Alberta Medical Association (AMA) presented its proposal for Negotiations 2008 last December. The government's attention to pre-election, election and post-election events delayed a response from Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW).

Two days ago, however, AHW offered a response. Also in attendance were representatives from Alberta Health Services (AHS), the new board that has taken over the responsibilities of the nine regional health authorities.

The AMA's Negotiating Committee now is analyzing the AHW response, and another meeting among the three parties is being scheduled for next week.

As I stated in my June 9 letter: "The AMA's goal is to reach a negotiated agreement in a timely manner. Any of the three parties, however, has the right to arbitrate and the AMA will prepare for arbitration to ensure a timely completion of Negotiations 2008."

In addition to the excellent work of the AMA's Negotiating Committee and the preparations for arbitration, as another option for the board's consideration the Physician Advocacy Group will be asked to develop an action plan and strategy.

If Negotiations 2008 are not resolved before mid-September, then they will be a priority when the Representative Forum meets September 19-20 in Edmonton.

Allocation

Last month the three parties to the trilateral Master Agreement agreed to expand the continuance of the agreement. Continuance refers to conditions in place as an agreement is being negotiated and is not a replacement for a negotiated settlement.

A key provision of this continuance was a 2.5% across-the-board increase to the Schedule of Medical Benefits and all alternate relationship plans (ARPs) effective April 1, 2008, and with payments retroactive to this date.

Because our priority was to provide an immediate fee increase to physicians (and to avoid several months of delay due to further negotiations and the usual allocation process), an across-the-board increase was chosen.

As for the next allocation – which requires the concurrence of all three parties – the board's preference is that it combines both the 2008-09 and 2009-10 budgets and:

- All sections receive a minimum 2.5%, thereby retaining the interim April 1 across-the-board increase.
- The after-hours payment rewrite be implemented April 1, 2009.
- Additional funds for priority items will be targeted to the sections of General Practice, General Psychiatry, General Surgery, Internal Medicine and Pediatrics.

The distribution of any additional monies available as the result of Negotiations 2008 will require further direction from the Board of Directors.

Alberta Health Services

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is the new single board that replaces those for the nine regional health authorities, mental health and cancer. Ken Hughes is the chair of AHS, Charlotte Robb is its chief executive officer. Michael A. Gormley, the AMA's Executive Director, and I have met with them several times.

At its July 17-18 meeting, the Board of Directors dedicated several hours to finalizing the AMA's approach to the new landscape in Alberta's health care system, recognizing that the future holds a number of unknowns.

In my next *President's Letter*, I will review in some detail the AMA's approach, including the roles of physicians in advocacy and in medical administrative structures. The AMA has also organized a meeting on September 4 for the presidents of all the regional medical organizations.

Of course, Patients First® will be a primary measurement in our assessment of any future changes to Alberta's health care system.

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Your input

Each *President's Letter* and each *Focus on Negotiations* results in a number of emails from AMA members. Some offer their opinions and perspectives, others seek additional information (which the AMA staff provides). I greatly value your input, and I encourage all members to help keep me informed.

Yours truly,

Darryl D. LaBuick, MD, CCFP
President