
The President's Letter

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Dear Member:

Negotiations are a means to improve patient care

With the eight-year, trilateral Master Agreement expiring March 31, 2011, the Alberta Medical Association (AMA) is preparing for Negotiations 2011 with the government and Alberta Health Services. The landmark 2003 agreement established a relationship between the three parties that is unique in Canada.

From the AMA perspective, negotiations are a means through which we can support patient care and effective delivery of health care services. Negotiations provide an opportunity for the three parties to collaborate and work together to tackle health care issues.

The physician-patient relationship is the cornerstone of medical care. With physicians on the front lines of service delivery, we are well positioned to not only experience first-hand the challenges facing health care delivery today, but also to develop innovative solutions to address these challenges. Our ongoing and close relationships with our patients give us the vision to determine effective ways to deliver health care.

A good example of one such solution, in the 2003 agreement, saw the development of primary care networks (PCNs). Physicians are the backbone of the primary care networks, which are designed to improve access to, and coordination of, primary care services through team-based delivery.

Physician Compensation Strategy

The AMA's Physician Compensation Strategy Board Steering Committee (PCSBSC) is a Board of Directors' committee that develops, oversees and executes the Physician Compensation Strategy, an AMA tool for strategic planning around physician compensation. Physician compensation – all the ways that physicians are reimbursed for their services and supported in their practices – is intimately linked to service delivery.

The strategy develops policy and initiatives that support patient care and innovative service delivery, and appropriately remunerate physicians for their roles in the provision of care. The strategy reflects AMA's ability to represent patient needs and provide Value for Patients™.

With negotiations around the corner, the PCSBSC has a new role in an expert advisory capacity to the AMA's Negotiating Committee. PCSBSC will generate and vet ideas for initiatives that support delivery and solve problems within the health care system, and dovetail with the broader context of physician compensation.

It is this ability to address health care issues that affords us the unique relationship with government and our patients, and gives us an effective seat at the negotiating table in addressing health care challenges.

The key objectives of the Physician Compensation Strategy include:

1. **Access** – Ensure Albertans have access to timely, quality care
 - Improve the percentage of Albertans with a family physician
 - Improve supply of physicians by section and region relative to targets
 - Reduce wait times for key procedures
2. **Productivity** – Support efficiency and cost-effectiveness in the use of physicians' time and skills
 - Albertans have access to advances in medical sciences and new services
 - Comprehensive primary medical care is provided to Albertans
 - Innovations in delivery and organization are supported
 - Family physician-specialist linkages are enhanced
3. **Equity** – Improve relative fairness of physician compensation at fee and income levels
 - Relative fees reflect expenses and physician remuneration for time, intensity and complexity, as well as after-hours work
 - Incomes between sections reflect expenses, hours of work, after-hours work, etc.
 - Incomes between methods of payment are comparable

As you have read above, the Physician Compensation Strategy will be an important tool to guide AMA's proposals for Negotiations 2011, based on initiatives that support patients through innovation and physicians through appropriate remuneration.

I'd like to thank all the physicians who responded to my questions in my last *President's Letter*. I appreciate hearing your concerns and also your ideas for the road ahead of us. Your comments are always welcome at president@albertadoctors.org.

Yours truly,

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President