

The President's Letter

Dr. Noel W. Grisdale



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Dear Member:

The Alberta Medical Association (AMA) is still in discussions to finalize Negotiations 2008 for a fiscal agreement running April 1, 2008 to March 31, 2011 when the eight-year master agreement concludes. We remain confident an agreement can be reached.

It has, though, been a long wait and I understand every physician is anxious for this to be settled! I can only thank you again for your support and your patience and hope to deliver more concrete news in the near future.

A special thank you to those physicians who have contacted their MLAs, or who are in the process of doing so, to emphasize the importance of a timely agreement with the AMA and the value of engaging physicians.

Physician engagement is essential as government makes changes to Alberta's health care system. The onus on physicians is to put Patients First® and to advocate for a culture and a structure that will enable us to fulfill both our clinical responsibilities and patient advocacy obligations.

To do so, the AMA is concentrating its resources and expertise on physician engagement and leadership by focusing on:

- Alberta Health Services (AHS), the new, single, province-wide health authority, including physicians' relationship with the new board and medical staff bylaws
- The forthcoming report from the McKinsey Group
- Data stewardship and the privacy and confidentiality of a patient's information in the electronic medical record (EMR)

Alberta Health Services

The AMA has been the catalyst for the Council of Presidents with presidents or designates from the nine regional medical organizations (that existed with the former nine regional health authorities), as well as AMA's Immediate Past President Dr. Darryl D. LaBuick and me.

The council's two immediate priorities are (1) development of a single set of province-wide medical staff bylaws and (2) the medical organizational structure for AHS.

- **Medical staff bylaws** – A multi-party working group, with AMA representatives, originally was asked to draft a provincial template for medical staff bylaws. With the creation of AHS, its mandate has changed to a single set of province-wide bylaws. The Council of Presidents has provided numerous suggestions.
- **AHS medical organizational structure** – The council supported the principles proposed by an AHS consultant and offered specific comments on eight different topics.

The AMA and the presidents' council are guided by the "Principles to Guide Physician Relationships with Alberta Health Services." (The principles are available on the AMA's website at <http://www.albertadoctors.org/AMA/PrinciplesAHS>.) The AMA is also providing senior staff and administrative resources to the council.

McKinsey Group

Alberta Health and Wellness has retained McKinsey Group, a major international consultancy, to help it to articulate a vision for the future and how it will be achieved. Because of the importance that the government has attached to the work of the McKinsey Group, I would encourage the minister to quickly make the report public.

With direction from the Representative Forum, as well as our mandate and leadership, the AMA is well-positioned to critique the McKinsey report.

Privacy and confidentiality of patients' medical information

As Alberta pursues a provincial electronic health record (pEHR), government wants to include some patient information that has traditionally been held in confidence by physicians – a cornerstone of the physician-patient relationship!

However, as I discussed in considerable detail in my October 1 *President's Letter*:

“The province’s desire to move to EMRs (electronic medical records that are the responsibility of physicians) and the pEHR requires major and far-reaching decisions related to data stewardship, patient confidentiality and the impact on the doctor-patient relationship.

“The involvement and the engagement of physicians and respect for our perspectives and front-line expertise require a meaningful and substantive role for the AMA.”

In closing, I wish to recognize Alberta Health and Wellness Minister Ron Liepert for three recent decisions:

- Launching the province-wide human papillomavirus (HPV) immunization
- Supporting a ban on the use of cell phones in motor vehicles
- Reorganizing the department so that the provincial medical officer of health now reports directly to the minister

Access, Innovation & Doctors headlines the AMA’s approach to Negotiations 2008, and I will continue to keep you updated. Input and feedback from AMA members is very important. I encourage you to email me at president@albertadoctors.org.

Yours truly,

Noel W. Grisdale, MD, CCFP
President