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# The President's Letter

Dr. Darryl D. LaBuick



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Patients First® Patients First® is a registered trademark of the Alberta Medical Association.

December 19, 2007

Dear Member:

The Alberta Medical Association's (AMA's) advocacy for timely access to quality health care for Albertans is being advanced on several fronts including negotiations and the computerization of physicians' offices with the electronic medical record (EMR).

As well, this past year we have been heavily involved scrutinizing proposed legislation that will impact the delivery of care to patients, the role of physicians and the activities of the AMA.

This letter deals with Negotiations 2008 and one of the six bills dealt with by the Alberta Legislature, Bill 41, the *Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007*.

The future of the Physician Office System Program (POSP) and a transition strategy for physicians was a major topic at last week's meeting of the AMA Board of Directors. You will be hearing much more about this in the coming months.

## **Negotiations 2008**

Patients First® is much more than a registered trademark for the Alberta Medical Association: it is the vision that underpins our mission statement and influences our activities.

The AMA has used its trilateral agreement with Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW) and the regional health authorities (RHAs) to advance programs and policies that ultimately put Patients First®.

Our strategy is fourfold:

- Total physician compensation – to encourage recruitment and retention; to encourage innovation in delivery of health care
- Physician health – to support physician health individually and collectively as an essential component of physician retention and quality care

- Information management and technology – to promote an e-health future in which physicians can deliver optimum care
- Quality assurance – to promote high quality care and patient safety through continuous professional learning

We summarized some of the successes of this approach in a report to MLAs, “10 Ways Your Constituents Benefit from the Trilateral Agreement.” To view this document, go to <http://www.albertadoctors.org/PresLetter/Index>.

For Negotiations 2008, this focus on Patients First® is being expressed as *Access, Innovation & Doctors*.

Access and Innovation are features of the primary care networks (PCNs). These made-in-Alberta partnerships between family physicians and regional health authorities put Patients First® through the creation of health care teams.

Currently about 1,300 family physicians are involved in 26 primary care networks, which provide care to 1.5 million Albertans. Our goal is to make networks available to all Albertans.

The AMA, working with the Alberta Pharmacists' Association (RxA), was the catalyst in bringing pharmacists into the primary care networks. There are now 35 pharmacists in 11 networks offering valuable services such as structured medicine reviews.

Doctors – recruitment and retention – are imperative, especially given the international competition for our services and the predicted shortage of 1,500 doctors by 2010. An effective strategy needs to recognize factors such as income, continuing medical education, physician wellness, e-health and office computerization.

At its September 28-29 fall meeting, the 116-delegate Representative Forum (RF) endorsed the AMA's direction for these negotiations for a three-year fiscal agreement (April 1, 2008-March 31, 2011). The eight-year trilateral master agreement also expires March 31, 2011.

The Alberta Medical Association is well prepared for negotiations. There was some preliminary work among the three parties, but the first official meeting of the three negotiating committees only occurred this week.

It's most important that all three parties endeavor to try and reach an agreement before the current two-year fiscal agreement expires March 31, 2008. Indeed, many physicians would say there is a real urgency to do so!

Physicians remember the financial problems that occurred when the last negotiations stretched out for 18 months. A number of you have told the AMA you are unable to wait that long again. I may be calling on your support if it appears that negotiations will not be resolved expeditiously.

While the AMA's Negotiating Committee pursues opportunities at the negotiating table, the AMA's Physician Advocacy Group and the AMA's Government Affairs Committee are helping us to assess opportunities in other venues.

#### Bill 41

On December 5 the Alberta Government passed Bill 41, the *Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007*, with both committee-of-the-whole and third reading in the closing hours of the fall sitting of the Alberta Legislature.

The AMA and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) invested considerable time and effort, and we were successful in securing several changes:

- The minister of health and wellness cannot act unilaterally to take over the college or some of its functions, as originally proposed. Instead, any such action must be a decision by the whole cabinet.
- The original proposal was to give the minister of health and wellness the authority to dictate bylaws, regulations, standards of practice and our code of ethics. The code of ethics was not included in the final legislation.
- Requiring the government to consult with the profession before it acts was added. However, the value of this change remains unknown because government will decide the terms of this consultation.

Unfortunately, these changes to the original bill do not fully address the serious concerns raised by the AMA and CPSA, as well as the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta and the Alberta College of Pharmacists.

I wish to thank all the AMA members who contacted Premier Ed Stelmach, Health and Wellness Minister Dave Hancock and their MLA. Your voices added credibility to our efforts! The AMA expressed its concerns and opposition in a number of ways including:

- Meetings and conversations with the minister, other MLAs and government staff
- Lobbying by the AMA's MD-MLA contacts
- Resolutions by the AMA's Representative Forum and the Canadian Medical Association's Board of Directors
- A brief to the Legislature's Standing Committee on Community Services
- December 1 newspaper ad, "Bill 41 is a threat to quality health care for Albertans"

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A number of opposition MLAs spoke against the bill. And, Laurie Blakeman (Edmonton-Centre), the Liberal's health critic, said if she is the next minister of health and wellness, "I would be repealing sections 135.1 through 135.3."

The first three months as your president have been hectic, exciting and rewarding in many ways. It is an honor to represent you, and I very much value your emails and feedback. With your support, I look forward to the coming year.

Yours truly,

Darryl D. LaBuick, MD, CCFP  
President

**P.S.** The Board of Directors congratulated "AMA staff and contractors on their very successful charitable fundraising efforts in 2007." About 110 employees and contractors in Calgary and Edmonton this year raised about \$34,000 for the United Way, Canadian Cancer Society, Edmonton Christmas Bureau, the Mustard Seed Society in both Calgary and Edmonton, and the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Alberta. In the Supercities Walk for MS, Team AMA was third in fundraising in the Edmonton area and sixth overall in the province.