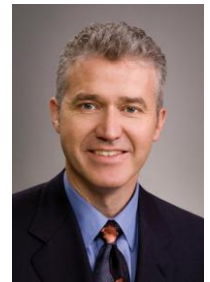




The President's Letter

Dr. Christopher J.(Chip) Doig



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July 13, 2010

Dear Member:

In this letter:

- ***AMA's approach to primary and chronic care being built around "a medical home"***
- ***Board of Directors to consider Negotiating Committee's draft paper***

Primary care

Physician-led primary care networks (PCNs) are a major success story of innovation in Alberta's health care system. A few years from now, though, we may view PCNs not as the end result but, rather, as the catalyst for even greater innovation and success in the delivery of primary care to Albertans.

The vision for PCNs was initially developed within the Alberta Medical Association (AMA) and then included in the current trilateral master agreement (April 1, 2003 – March 31, 2011) between the former regional health authorities [now Alberta Health Services (AHS)], Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW) and the AMA.

Even with the popularity and success of PCNs, an estimated 20% of Albertans still do not have a family physician. Access to primary care and availability of family physicians are, therefore, priorities for all three parties as we enter into Negotiations 2011.

The AMA's approach to primary and chronic care is being led by the Section of General Practice, Section of Rural Medicine and PCN Leads, which are working closely with the Alberta College of Family Physicians.

The AMA's strategy aligns with Patients First® and Value for Patients™, and is being built around the concept of "a medical home" as developed by the College of Family Physicians of Canada. The five pillars of the medical home are:

- A personal family doctor for every patient
- Access to a patient-centred team
- Timely access to patient-centred care
- Coordination of care including access to consulting specialists
- Electronic information and communication, e.g., electronic medical record (EMR)

The strategy requires appropriate funding and resources, quality improvement processes and evaluation. Other supports include access to practice management services and governance models for the relationship of independent medical practices and the rest of the health care system.

Alberta Health Services has also been engaging stakeholders, including the AMA, in developing its "Discussion Paper on Primary Care Models." The *Edmonton Journal* July 10 story on the AHS paper was headlined, "More power, bonuses proposed for GPs." (Read the article at <http://www.albertadoctors.org/PresLet/Index>.) A shorter version appeared in the *Calgary Herald* ("Family doctors may get more say; Alberta to look at U.K. model of care").

The AHS paper points out that enhanced PCNs are a major way forward in supporting primary care. There are, however, other opportunities such as modernizing the Schedule of Medical Benefits, introducing telephone and internet consultations, and clarifying roles via a patient's charter. Strong linkages among primary, secondary and tertiary care are also essential, with the AHS clinical networks providing one option.

At its upcoming July 22-23 meeting, the AMA Board of Directors will be updated on progress in developing a strategy for primary and chronic care, including a consultation process. Opportunities for working more closely with AHS are also being explored.

As a result of the media reports about the AHS paper, several members contacted the AMA with their views, concerns and questions. These will be taken into consideration as we move forward.

I must emphasize that the AMA's approach is still under development. Furthermore, no final decisions have been made – by AHS, Alberta Health and Wellness or the AMA, individually or trilaterally – regarding the direction for primary and chronic care in Alberta, or for the future of PCNs when the master agreement ends March 31, 2011.

Negotiations 2011

In March, I reported that the spring Representative Forum had endorsed the AMA's approach to Negotiations 2011, but formal negotiations would not begin until this fall with the weeks and months used to:

- Build relationships.
- Ascertain if AHS and AHW favor interest-based negotiations and, if they do, explore the potential for this approach. (Interest-based negotiations are where the parties identify their priorities and explore ways to achieve them jointly.)
- Draft opening papers based on the "issues list" and the outcomes from discussions regarding interest-based negotiations.
- Engage AMA members, MLAs, public and media.

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At its meeting next week, the Board of Directors will review a draft paper from the AMA's Negotiating Committee in preparation for the September 24-25 fall meeting of the Representative Forum.

Your ideas, concerns and perspectives influence the decisions of the Representative Forum and the Board of Directors. That's why your emails, letters, telephone calls and participation in AMA surveys are so important! My email address is president@albertadoctors.org. I hope to hear from you; you'll certainly continue to hear from me.

Yours truly,

Christopher J. (Chip) Doig, MD, MSc, FRCPC
President