February 13, 2020

Dear Family Physicians,

I write to you today as your new President of the Section of Family Medicine.

As many of you are aware, Dr. Kathryn Andrusky resigned her position as president of the Section of Family Medicine in January. I took up the role on January 22 and will remain in place as SFM President until our regularly scheduled AGM on September 24, 2020.

I want to take this opportunity to, once again, thank Kathryn for her extraordinary contributions to the Section of Family Medicine. Kathryn is an exceptional advocate for primary care and she has worked tirelessly to advance family medicine in Alberta. Her efforts and influence are sincerely appreciated.

I am pleased to announce that the SFM Executive appointed two new Members-at-Large on September 24 - Dr. Darryl LaBuick (St. Albert family physician and former SFM Past President) and Dr. Sadhana (Mindy) Gautama (Airdrie family physician). We are pleased to welcome both Darryl and Mindy to their Member-at-Large roles and look forward to having their voices at the SFM table.

I want to reassure all of you that throughout these personnel changes, we have not lost our focus and we continue to move forward with section priorities.

**Negotiations**

In a recent *President’s Letter*, Dr. Molnar, informed members that negotiations with government have moved into mediation.

I have recently met with Dr. Molnar and have a further meeting scheduled with all three AMA Executive Officers (Drs. Molnar, Boucher and Clarke) and AMA CEO, Mike Gormley. I have been reassured that the AMA is fighting hard for family physicians at the negotiating table.

I was pleased to see recent media coverage where Minister Shandro stated publicly that he will delay bringing in changes to fees so that the province can continue discussions with physicians at the negotiating table.

The Board is fully aware of how detrimental the government’s proposals would be to family medicine and therefore recognize why it is so important to oppose these inappropriate and inequitable changes. I believe that the Board understands and values primary care as the cornerstone of our health system.

**Advocacy**

I want to extend sincere appreciation to the family physicians who have been advocating with their own MLAs and other government officials through one-on-one meetings, phone calls, letters, patient letters and patient petitions.

I am pleased to report that we had a fantastic response to our SFM patient letter campaign and our SFM petition. Over 700 of you copied us on your patient letters and/or petitions, and AMA staff forwarded the documents, en masse, last Thursday to Minister Shandro.
If you are still collecting patient letters, or patient signatures on the petition sheets, you are not too late. Please continue to forward your patients letters and petitions to the AMA - there is strength in numbers!

Please send completed documents to:

Alberta Medical Association
fax: 780.482.5445
email: amamail@albertadoctors.org
mailing address: 12230 106 Ave NW, Edmonton AB T5N 3Z1

I would also encourage you to check out the AMA’s newest publication, DOCing STATION (member login required). DOCing STATION is intended to keep members up-to-date on negotiations and other important issues, and it provides links to many resources that can be used in your own channels and conversations (i.e. infographics, media stories, reports/studies, etc.).

This information is presented to physicians in easy-to-use formats so that we may act both collectively and individually, as ambassadors for ourselves and our patients.

Please read the information and share it as you see fit. Government has not been shy about putting out their own perspectives and information, and we shouldn’t be either. We are the voice of our profession and our patients, and we should not be afraid to raise it.

**Income Equity**

While negotiations are certainly taking up a lot of AMA time and attention, the Income Equity Initiative studies are continuing in the background, and our section is actively participating in this work. The project is expected to be completed in late 2020, with application starting in 2021, pending approval by the AMA membership and Alberta Health.

I will have more information to share with you over the next few months as these studies progress.

**In closing**

This is an extremely busy time for SFM. We are working on several priority areas, but our most immediate focus continues to be on advocating against the government’s harmful consultation proposals and working with the AMA to ensure that family physicians are strongly represented at the negotiating table. We also continue to maintain close contact with the AMA Board to ensure the perspectives of family physicians are heard and understood in the wider AMA.

I am committed to keeping family physicians informed as we move through the coming months. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to me at sfmpres@albertadoctors.org.

Best regards,

Dr. Craig Hodgson
President, AMA Section of Family Medicine