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### Partners: to be or not to be...?

Since assuming the Section of Family Medicine presidency, I have been reflecting a lot on partnerships and what it means to be a true partner. As family physicians, our natural tendencies are often towards partnerships and collaboration. After all, at their core, patient-centred care and team-based medicine are all about partnerships. As medical leaders, partnerships and alliances are often what we seek in order to make the clinical and health system changes we want for our patients and physician colleagues.

We have had ongoing success with this in multiple health system environments. This October, our Section, as well as the Section of Rural Medicine, had our first completely integrated strategic retreat with the PCN Physician Leads Executive to solidify and strengthen that partnership. Similarly, the Section of Family Medicine continues to play an active role within the Primary Care Alliance (PCA) – a partnership of primary care groups, including the two Sections and PCN Physician Leads, as well as the ACFP and Departments of Family Medicine. We also partner with the AMA on many different strategic endeavours and have been active partners with Alberta Health on initiatives such as developing the Blended Capitation compensation model. Recently, Alberta Health colleagues have also expressed interest in further partnerships on UPC campaign platform issues such as further expanding the Patient’s Medical Home, expanding Alternate Payment Plan offerings, and on their Surgical Wait-Times Initiative.

So, what does it mean to be a true partner? And what do we, as the Section of Family Medicine, ask of and promise in return to our health system partners?

- **A common vision and the conviction to achieve it** – Fundamental to a partnership, the “why even partner”: in order to achieve what neither party can achieve on their own. Further, the trust that each partner is fully committed to the vision and to playing their part in fully achieving that vision.
- **The bravery and mutual respect to have honest discussions** – A true partner is one with whom you can have frank conversations, with an understanding that both/all parties have the same “good outcomes” in mind and will engage in the “hard chats” in a sincere effort to reach the best solutions.
- **An authentic “what do I bring” and “what can’t I bring” assessment** – No group or leader can do everything, but a critical awareness as to the contributions that can be made and the absolute no-go’s as to what can be promised and delivered upon and an honest disclosure of each is essential.
- **A reciprocal value of true engagement** – Few things devalue and disintegrate a partnership quicker than disingenuous involvement. An unwillingness to fully involve the partner in developing the solution, or critiquing without offering to assist in addressing/resolving the problems, weakens the partnership. A true partner authentically involves and contributes to “mutually building” the solutions.

There are obviously many other aspects of partnership, but when looking at health system partners, these cover some of the major stumbling blocks I've observed that tend to destroy rather than build partnerships.

The Section of Family Medicine is grateful that many health partners have recognized the critical importance of primary care involvement and the significant leadership offered by multiple family physicians throughout Alberta. It is encouraging that so many other associations have recognized that health system change is not possible, nor is it sustainable, without including primary care.

To best represent our members, and to build a stronger health system for our patients, our Section is eager to engage in these rare, but revolutionary, **true** partnerships. For myself, I see this as our best vehicle for contributing to health system improvement/evolution and wide-scale change management. That said, I am **not** particularly interested in the facade of "post-decision" consultation (i.e., rubber-stamping) or in communicating or "selling" someone else's message. Our Section Executive is seeking collaboration from the onset and the opportunity – and the shared obligation – to jointly build that shared vision of a better tomorrow. To those rare but true partners: we welcome the prospect of partnering with you!

Best regards,



Dr. Kathryn Andrusky  
President, AMA Section of Family Medicine



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***Our mailing address is:***

*12230 106 Ave NW  
Edmonton AB T5N 3Z1  
Canada*

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