



November 24, 2023

Dear members,

I want to share some thoughts on recent announcements, ongoing work and feedback from members and students.

### **Government announcement regarding nurse practitioners**

Wednesday's [government announcement that nurse practitioners will soon be able to open their own independent clinics](#) was positioned as a way to "help more Albertans access health care in their communities and close to home." While we all know too many Albertans are living without a family doctor, the implication that nurse practitioners are interchangeable with family doctors is disingenuous. [I released a statement](#) noting that while NPs could help fill some of the gaps in primary care, they are not family physicians, and any attempt to position them in that light is misleading. AMA President, Dr. Paul Parks spoke with media and his [President's Letter](#) linked to some of that coverage. [He also commented on social media](#), saying, "We love team-based care, but the best medical advice is often only from a physician." He's correct and we must all be relentless in making sure Albertans and government understand the difference.

Since the announcement I have received numerous letters from concerned members, wanting to know what actions the SFM and AMA are taking to address the crisis in family medicine and primary care. Members are understandably alarmed, angry, frustrated and hurt by the implication that their efforts and dedication to patient care are being overlooked and undervalued. I share these feelings. I want to assure you that the AMA and SFM are dedicated to finding solutions. I would urge all members to take a moment to review the most recent [Alberta Doctor's Digest](#) for a summary article regarding the current condition of family medicine in the face of the MAPS Report. I would also ask members to visit the AMA Strike Team Page referenced below for further details and updates.

### **AMA's Strike Team**

I mentioned in my last SFM Bulletin that the AMA had created a group to help action the MOU that the AMA and Alberta Health signed in late October. The Strike Team, which includes me and other members of the SFM Executive, as well as physician leaders from the SRM and the Physician Leads Executive, has been meeting weekly since October 30 and is digging into three streams of work:

- Stream 1: Core elements of a new payment model supporting and valuing longitudinal family practice, and other existing model improvements including costing and budget.
- Stream 2: Other elements of IMMEDIATE stabilization in primary care.
- Stream 3: Measures to reduce and/or address administrative burden in primary care.

Work is moving quickly as we need to have proposals ready to inform the upcoming provincial budget, which will be introduced in February. Dr. Paul Parks discussed some of this work in a recent [President's Letter](#), and noted there is a new [AMA Strike Team page](#) (member login required) that explains the work underway and includes weekly updates following each meeting. Your SFM Executive will keep you apprised as the work continues.

### **Health system restructuring**

On November 8, the government announced they would be [restructuring provincial health services](#), creating four separate crown corporations to assume the responsibilities of Alberta Health Services (AHS), including:

- Primary Care
- Acute Care (remaining within AHS)
- Mental Health and Addictions
- Continuing Care

This announcement raises many concerns, especially at a time when the system is already so strained. I have heard from some members who are concerned about how this restructuring will impact patient care and where the physicians whose work spans multiple areas will fit. In the days following the announcement, Dr. Parks was adamant that physicians must have input on what these changes look like. Your SFM Executive agrees and will be working to ensure the voice of family physicians is heard as the details around the restructuring are determined.

### **AMSCAR feedback**

SFM staff recently attended AMSCAR (Alberta Medical Students' Conference & Retreat), held in Canmore. The annual event welcomes medical students from the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary for a weekend of professional development and networking. This year, AMSCAR had approximately 300 registered students and over 170 students visited the SFM/SRM booth, with most visitors indicating they were in their first year. During conversations with staff, students shared that they were interested in learning more about family medicine and rural generalism. Many indicated they were seriously considering rural generalism and many of those noted they had been able to shadow in rural settings. Staff also heard students inquiring with other presenters about the anticipated overhead costs for family physicians and how to find practice opportunities. We were heartened by their interest and enthusiasm and will be exploring more ways to engage.

There is a lot going on right now and I welcome your thoughts. You can always reach me and the SFM Executive at [FamilyMedicine@albertadoctors.org](mailto:FamilyMedicine@albertadoctors.org).

Sincerely,



Dr. Sarah Bates, Acting President  
Section of Family Medicine  
*On behalf of your [SFM Executive](#)*