

June 22, 2021

Dr. Catherine Cervin
President College of Family Physicians of Canada

Dear Dr. Cervin:

The recent article by Dr. Roger Ladouceur that appears in the June 1 issue of the *Canadian Family Physician* journal into false stereotypes and is a disservice to physicians and the public.

The article notes the challenging circumstances arising from a global pandemic and, viewed at its best, is a call to all of us to keep the interests of our patients foremost in our minds – a philosophy on which all would agree. The article falls short by failing to acknowledge that thousands of physicians and other health care workers are doing just that. It also does not recognize that sustaining our primary care infrastructure and health workforce is an important and fundamental aspect of sustaining our health care system.

Phrases like ‘Family Medicine is not a business’ are misleading and can perpetrate unrealistic and harmful misperceptions. Most primary care across the country is delivered through community practices. These are indeed small businesses that employ staff, pay rent and utilities. The fragility of these businesses was made painfully clear during the lock down last spring. While some provincial governments supported these practices through different payment models others felt that a virtual care fee schedule would support them and patients who were unable to attend in person. Maintaining this community primary care infrastructure is vital to Canadians – it is the backbone of health care in our country. These small businesses are essential to the delivery of health care in the community, and many are important economic drivers in rural communities. In Alberta we have seen a number of these small businesses fail. This is a loss to patients and their communities – but also the physicians that run them. Family medicine must also survive to do good.

The article does point out some important themes surrounding virtual care health policy. When are virtual visits appropriate, how should they be remunerated and where should the balance be struck between convenience and continuity of care? Virtual care has the potential to be a great enabler of comprehensive care but it also has the potential to disrupt continuity for the sake of convenience of access. There is much work to be done and we must move away from the simplistic analytical approach to complex problems employed in the article.

Sincerely,



Paul E. Boucher, MD, FRCPC
President, Alberta Medical Association