

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Valedictory address from immediate past president

Wow! That went fast! I was told when I became president that the year would go by very quickly, and even still, I am blown away by how quickly it has completely disappeared on me. This has been altogether the most rewarding, challenging, exciting, sobering, ego-pumping, humbling and educational experience of my life.

When I set out on the journey, I had a few goals, personally and for the organization. Like all presidents, I wanted to leave the place in a better state than when I started. I was a little surprised that others would think that I had a skill set that would be valuable to the organization at this time. The AMA staff, though, have a saying after watching many people go through this experience: "We always get the president we need at the time." I hope I have served you well.

So, what were my goals? I wanted to have a successful outcome to our negotiations. As it turned out, because of the amazing negotiating team, I wasn't really needed in the actual negotiations. Where I was needed was in the communication of the deal. I discovered skills I didn't even know were there in explaining the intricacies of the deal in multiple different ways. This need to explain to members was equally of use in sharing the complexities of our evolving AMA Physician Compensation Strategy.

That lined up perfectly with my second goal. I wanted to examine and try to improve the way the AMA communicates with members. I discovered that I have learned a ton from my son on how to connect in new and different ways. I spent many hours on the phone and Google Hangout learning how to make and edit videos and podcasts, and I learned how to create content. Our communications staff has been right there with me, learning and experimenting with different techniques. By being willing to experiment, I think we have opened the door to a new standard in communications with our members. I have received countless positive comments from members on the *President's Letters* format, and that is very satisfying. We are now developing a new communications strategy that will hopefully result in even better two-way connections between the AMA board and members. That ability to link directly with our own members has never been more important than in these days of instant discourse via social media.

We have a lot to look forward to as an organization. The new agreement has put in place many things we have been working toward for years. We will soon have legislation that gives all Alberta physicians the ability to have the AMA represent them. We have been able to transform primary care network governance from 42 local entities to a single centralized model that will allow truly provincial initiatives to occur across all of primary care. We have also been able to morph our change management programs from an unstable, segmented collection into a stable integrated program that is now among the largest change management program for physicians in the country. It will serve our physicians even better in the coming years. Our future negotiated agreements will be able to focus on stability of funding rather than having to renegotiate the individual programs as we have in the past.

In addition, our provincial health system is evolving to enable patient information to be available to physicians and for our patients to have access to their health information wherever they are — in the hospital, in their physician’s office or even at their kitchen table. This eventual ability to access patient information will allow us to evolve from considering the patient’s medical home to the medical neighborhood and coordination of all the various caregivers in the care of our patients.

With this new-found stability in our programs and the plans for system improvements, we are able to expand our focus in important new directions. The emerging priority of a healthy workplace, including examining and improving in diversity of leadership, equity and the gender pay gap, respect in the workplace, and physician burnout will prove challenging and exciting as our organization moves forward.

Our relationships with our health partners are going to be a major influence on us over the coming years. The recent major changes in the CMA governance, and their plan to move their focus from few physicians to many physicians, will fit very well with our planned emphasis on engaging our members through various methods and avenues. Our relationship with the CMA promises to be an important part of our organization’s priorities going forward. Our relationship with Alberta Health Services and the Government of Alberta will similarly need to be nurtured as we all work toward improving our health care system. We have maintained our position in Canada as a group of physicians who care so greatly about how the system works for our patients that we focus on the positives in all our dealings with our system partners, and we work through the inevitable disagreements to come up with changes that benefit patients. It is clear that there is still a long way to go on many fronts, but it is also clear that true system improvement cannot happen without physicians as leaders of the change.

I want to thank the membership of the AMA for your support and for your emails and calls. Thank you all for challenging and rewarding me beyond what I could have imagined! I thank all of you for the trust you have placed in me by giving me the opportunity to serve as your president.

In case you are wondering what I’m going to do next now that I have finished my year as president – I’m going to Disneyland!

I have been at your service.

- *Dr. Neil Cooper*

Banner photo credit: Curtis Comeau