

Alberta Doctors' Digest

2021 Political Advocacy Day

On November 29, 2021, the Government Affairs and Advocacy Committee (GAAC) composed of medical students from the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary hosted the annual Political Advocacy Day. This event, where Alberta medical students meet with the members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) to discuss a health care topic that is important to Albertans, has been taking place since 2008. The relationship established between Alberta medical students and the Alberta legislature has borne many successes in the past and will continue to allow ongoing dialogue on pertinent advocacy and policy issues.

While the primary purpose of this event is to promote health advocacy, it is also an excellent opportunity for students to develop their advocacy skills as future physicians. This event allows students to directly engage in political change and to advocate for a better health care system in an organized and professional manner. Medical students represent the future of health care in the province, and it is important to share our voice on key issues.

This year, our advocacy topic was health care worker burnout. Burnout is characterized as the culmination of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced professional efficacy. Health care burnout calls in to question the future capacity and sustainability of our health care system. It contributes to increased medical errors, substance use, workforce attrition and suicide. It also contributes to decreased patient safety and satisfaction. Sub-optimal mental health of practitioners will result in sub-optimal care for patients.

Prior to Political Advocacy Day, students were trained by experts from the Alberta Medical Association, the Canadian Federation of Medical Students and a third-party political advertiser. The event was sponsored by the Alberta Medical Association.

On November 29, about 25 medical students met with MLAs from the United Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party to deliver our call to action pertaining to the advocacy topic.



About 25 medical students met with MLAs from the United Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party to deliver their call to action related to health care worker burnout. (Photo credit: Pixabay.com)

Alberta medical students call on the provincial government to enact short-term, and more importantly, long-term strategies to address health care worker burnout.

Short-Term

1. Review staffing and scheduling to ensure adequate intershift recovery. Overtime hours should be avoided whenever possible.
2. Provide training and support to promote health care worker confidence and competency when they are reassigned to new areas with unfamiliar work tasks.
3. Develop and implement programs aimed at addressing challenges directly related to burnout: managing interpersonal conflict, workplace abuse, work-home interference and the increasing levels of moral distress during the pandemic.

Long-Term

1. Establish a health care worker wellness task force within Alberta Health to investigate health care staff burnout and create an ongoing process to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions aimed at reducing clinical burnout. This task force should include representatives from Alberta Health Services, regulatory bodies, and physicians and allied health care professionals in order to develop effective strategies.

This group should:

- Review policies such as call time, hours worked, people on staff, etc.
- Establish more wellness services.
- Break down barriers (structural, cultural, individual) for health care workers to seek help and support.
- Proactively prepare for the management of future health care demands.

MLAs were generally supportive of our call to action and recognized the importance of this issue. In addition to meetings with MLAs, the chairs of the Government Affairs and Advocacy Committee conducted three media interviews with CTV News Edmonton, City News Edmonton and 630 CHED AM Radio, where we highlighted the importance of this advocacy topic and our support for all health care workers.

Political Advocacy Day has fostered a partnership with the government with the goal to help provide optimal care and improve our health care system for the benefit of all Albertans. We are looking forward to the actions the government takes in collaboration with health care workers to address burnout and alleviate pressure in the system moving forward.

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