



“Hello, Hello?”



“Can you hear me Now?”



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I think it is fair to say it has been an interesting year. A year of panic buying toilet paper and hand sanitizer, and of PPE shortages. It has also been a year in which I have been proud and inspired by all my colleagues. Everyone - be they Physicians, Nurses, Carers, House-keeping, MOA's, Fraser Health staff, Divisions of Family Practice, Medical Staff Associations, the Ministry and the Doctors of BC - everyone stepped up to help face the challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic. I would like to take a moment to remember the ultimate price paid by those who have lost their lives.

The challenges posed by SARS-CoV-2 virus and the response to the COVID 19 Pandemic have dominated all of our lives. The initial lockdown with the cancellation of non-urgent procedures and tests and the reduction in the availability of routine health care caused harm to many. For physicians there have been multiple stresses – increased costs, reduced income, reduced capacity, burn out, and mental health issues. I am inspired by the response to these challenges that saw physicians providing rapid innovative responses in all communities and the Doctors of BC being able to respond rapidly to advocate for and to provide practical support for physicians.

As a Family Physician in Mission I set up and became the Medical Director of our local COVID 19 testing and safe respiratory assessment site, a partnership with the Mission Division of Family Practice and Fraser Health. This site continues to provide the community with a dedicated service for patients with respiratory symptoms that need physical assessment, thus protecting the community physicians, staff, the patients and the local ER. Currently I am the Medical site lead for the Mission drive-thru mass influenza clinics. At Division's we ran weekly town-halls and along with everyone else discussed the what, where, when, cost and availability of PPE. We actively engaged in physician wellness activities. At our local hospital, where I am chair of the MSA, we were able to support and advocate for all the health care workers onsite, and for a while it felt like the physician voice was being heard in the leadership meetings. I am sure these experiences have a resonance with many who will have lived the same or similar experiences. At my office of 10 physicians and a nurse practitioner we emptied our waiting room and shifted to virtual care dealing with unreliable video links and reduced ability to see patients in person.

Doctors of BC has been able to advocate for physicians by working with Sections and the Ministry to develop virtual care fees, ensure a PPE supply chain, develop the short term COVID contracts for Fee for Service physicians affected by the shutdown. The Doctors of BC have also been able to provide advice and financial supports for developing strategies for the safe opening of offices.

Doctors of BC and the Board has continued with work other than pandemic response. In the last year the Board has accepted fully the report on diversity and inclusion with steps taken to introduce the recommendations. I was able to be part of the WorkSafeBC negotiations team that concluded a recently ratified contract with WorkSafeBC. Doctors of BC has had input into the offering by the Ministry of new contracts to physicians looking for alternative payment modalities that suit their practice styles, including New to Practice contracts and Group Contracts for existing physicians looking to work in a team based environment of the primary care networks.



*I acknowledge that I live and work on the unceded, traditional, and ancestral territories of the Sty:lō People, particularly the Sq'ewel'ts, Matsqui, Kwantlen and Leq'á:mel Peoples.*

There is a lot more work to do. There is work I want to continue to be involved with and advocate at the Board.

The Pandemic has enabled us to move swiftly on certain things especially the adoption of virtual care. We need now to consolidate and refocus and develop longer term plans.

The pandemic has created a realisation that we need to relook at fixed overhead costs, especially with reduced activity and incomes together the increased cost of providing services in this changed world. Strategies to support physicians their staff and family's wellness and to prevent burnout are needed. Doctors of BC has made a start in accepting the Diversity and Inclusion report, implementing the recommendations and further developing responses to endemic and institutionalised racism as highlighted by the recent examples of First Nations Peoples abuse and the Black Lives Matter movement.

The PMA negotiations will start in 2021 with a majority NDP government at the start of their term of office in an economic climate that is "not good" and unlikely to be favourable for any monetary increases. The PMA negotiations are likely to be fraught and we need to think of ways of advocating with Government such that they can see the benefit of supporting physician's work where there will be no fee increases.

I would like to suggest that Government may accept support for physicians for costs e.g. fixed cost overhead support and the increased cost of providing services with support for PPE. Working with government to maintain and further develop the availability of virtual health care services is essential, especially given the overwhelming popularity of these services with the general population. Additionally, support for IT infrastructure costs to develop and support integrated EMR and virtual care should be sought.

In summary, we can be justifiably proud of our response as physicians and that of the Doctors of BC during the pandemic however the challenge is now to consolidate and develop resilience so that we can do more than just survive the second wave.

We must continue to advocate for the changes we want to see to further support the profession as we seek to provide the best possible health care in these challenging times, for the best fair economic reward and provider wellness.

I believe I have the experience, track record and skills to continue to make a contribution at the Doctor of the BC board.



Dr Lawrence Welsh  
Family Medicine Specialist

*Let us all be the leaders we are and be our best selves. Hopefully we will survive this stronger  
- we are genuinely "Better together".*



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