

Dr. Barbara Blumenauer, Specialist Position, Doctors of BC Board



As I write this in the waning days of October, I remember the quote from my favourite literary character Anne Shirley, that “I am so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers.” Despite the fall splendours outside my window, I must reflect on how the world has changed, as we have all at times been thrust into “the depths of despair” by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the pandemic has hit all members of society, it has disproportionately affected physicians as we fight the battle of the century. Physicians have provided ongoing care, often at the peril of our and our families’ health. As the pandemic waxes and wanes, along with physician popularity, we have shown up as leaders providing care, promoting pandemic measures and vaccinations. While the focus remains surviving the pandemic, there is legitimate fear about medicine post pandemic.

Up to 40% of the medical workforce may leave medicine post pandemic. Labour shortages may further impact access to longitudinal care in both family and consultant speciality practices. The primary care crisis is ongoing. We also have a speciality care crisis. How will surgical backlogs be cleared? Access to imaging is variable and problematic in many areas of the province. The effects on the long-term health of patients and the health care system from delayed care provision are unknown. The opioid crisis rages on.

Burn out was prevalent pre pandemic and will be worse post. Utilization of the Physician Health Program increased dramatically, and significant extra funding was allotted to the program by the Board. How will we meet the ongoing mental health needs of our members and our patients? Physicians report increased levels of abuse. Relationships are strained with patients, health authorities, governments and amongst physicians themselves.

Although the concerns of our members are many, when we speak as an organization, we can achieve substantial changes for our members and patients. Literally overnight, Virtual Care and Telehealth became universally available throughout the province.

Fee codes were obtained that allowed all physicians to provide ongoing medical care by whatever modality best suited their patients and practice. While all these concerns are daunting, during one of the most critical times in the history of medicine in BC, Doctors of BC members satisfaction scores increased on the most recent member survey. Most members felt Doctors of BC did an excellent job with pandemic related issues.

While physicians have many differences, we are more similar than different. We all desire autonomy over where we work, who we work with, how we are paid and deciding what a fair workload is. We want to be respected and treated equitably regardless of our type of practice, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or age. Doctors of BC is actively working to increase diversity and equity within our organization and while change takes time, we are making progress. As one of few women on the Board I see how difficult it is to achieve this goal, and how these dynamics can affect board function.

I have served on the “new board” for 4 years and the “old board” for 1 year. I have been the appointed board member to the governance committee, the nominations committee, and board observer to The Specialists of BC. I have met and heard firsthand stories and concerns from many of the RA members during past RA meetings.

I have gained an exceptional understanding of how Doctors of BC works. I have the experience needed to make complex decisions at a critical time for physicians in BC. This is particularly important during a negotiations year, in what is expected to be a difficult negotiation secondary to massive pandemic expenditures. I am loyal, trustworthy, diligent, inclusive, and fair. I am articulate and will speak up if things are unfair. I have been told I am a “kind warrior” and will kindly fight for the interests of all 14,000+ of our members. I have never missed a meeting in 5 years.

I have worked as a family physician, general internist, and rheumatologist in rural, suburban and metro areas. I worked in rural emergency rooms as the lone physician, delivered babies and provided surgical assists. I conducted outreach clinics to rural areas including First Nations communities. By working and training in 5 Canadian provinces, I have an excellent understanding of local, provincial and national health issues.

I mentored several past and current board members and will continue to do so if re-elected. In what will be my last term, I commit to providing mentorship to newer board members as a significant part of my role. I have the experience, dedication and skills required to continue to be an excellent board member. As we (hopefully) move into a post pandemic world, it will be extremely important to have a solid core of skilled board members. I have these skills and look forward to serving our organization for a final term. I respectfully request your support and your vote.