

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Family medicine's future: in our hands

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During the past few years, the very future of family medicine has been under threat. The steadily decreasing numbers of medical students choosing family medicine (24% in the 2003 Canadian Resident Matching Service program) will clearly exacerbate existing shortages¹ and long working hours² of Canada's family doctors.

Earlier this year, Dr Gutkin and I mentioned the type of support family doctors need to ensure survival of the discipline.³ Since then, government has begun to identify family medicine as a priority for recruitment and retention (www.hc-sc.ca), and Canada's medical schools are pursuing a strategy to meet public needs, potentially boosting our discipline.⁴

Commitment to care is key

Family doctors cannot rely on others to define their destiny. At the end of May, the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) held a Board

Summit on the "Future of Family Medicine in Canada" (see Vital Signs, page 1242). In October, the CFPC Board will approve follow-up actions from the Summit for the CFPC to pursue. These steps will be critical for our future, and I believe that our destiny will be shaped by the actions of every Canadian family physician.

Understanding why Canadians so highly value their family doctors' care is a central issue. Survey results likely reflect the fact that Canadian family physicians have been caring well for their patients. That care, however, is less comprehensive than it once was, especially in obstetrics, inpatient care, nursing home care, and housecalls.⁵ Access to care is also a serious problem. As individual practitioners, we must fully understand and address our patients' and communities' need for comprehensive care and for putting the four principles of family medicine into practice. If we do this, our future will be secure.

Canadians want family doctors to coordinate care and work in teams.⁶ Working in family practice networks, teams of physicians, nurses, and other health professionals can provide comprehensive care all day every day and still maintain balanced lives and reasonable workloads. Family physicians should create and promote strategies

to support comprehensive care in their communities.

Dream team

Over the past year, I have visited most of our provincial Chapters, been introduced in departments of family medicine, and met many family doctors and residents. I have been overwhelmed by the dedication and hard work of these physicians. I believe we have a "dream team" of committed family doctors in this country. That makes me optimistic about the future of family medicine in Canada. Government support and producing enough family doctors for our population are absolutely essential, but ultimately, I believe we will shape the future of our discipline. ♣

References

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