

ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS

ADDRESS TO THE ACFP MEMBERSHIP FROM OUTGOING PRESIDENT

DR. VISHAL BHELLA

MARCH 25, 2021

As my term as President of the Alberta College of Family Physicians comes to an end, I find cause to reflect on the past 33 months. It has been quite an interesting time, to say the very least, right from the day I took over as President. We have seen change in government, change in policy towards physicians and are living through a pandemic which has changed the way we not only practice, but live our lives.

Through this time, we learn the importance of strength and unity of the profession. The termination of the master agreement by the government could have shattered the foundation of the unity of our profession. Were there some cracks, sure, but the integrity of that foundation held strong. We learned that as a profession we share common vision, common purpose and the value of the support of our colleagues and our patients.

During the term of my Presidency, there has been continued efforts to support the profession and the patients we serve. The ACFP concluded its time as secretariat of the Opioid response initiative grant, a time that led to multi-stakeholder engagement in meeting the needs of a vulnerable at risk population including by training a significant number of physicians across the province in provision of opioid agonist therapy. To continue the work, particularly in the role of providing mentorship, we have successfully obtained a grant from Health Canada to continue supporting the Collaborative Mentorship Network for at least 3 additional years.

The need for advocacy for Family Physician and our patients has been made evident over the past couple of years. To enable us to do this work effectively, the ACFP has formally been added to the Alberta Lobbyist Registry to ensure we can continue to advocate strongly with all stakeholders, particularly with representatives of the government.

The challenges of the past couple of years have had significant impacts on not only our practices, but also on the wellbeing of many of our members. It has been important to see colleagues and patients rally behind us and recognize our importance in the system and in providing care on a day to day basis across the province.

Now, in early 2021, it is important to recognize the light we can start to see at the end of the tunnel. Virtual care codes have enable us to transition the way we deliver care and many of us blend virtual and in person delivery of care and will likely continue to do so after the pandemic. The ability to increase accessibility of care through virtual means is an important outcome of the pandemic. While the means are not perfect, it is certainly a shift from where we were one year ago.

The vaccination roll out is well underway. There has been recognition that family physicians need to be vaccinated, resulting in their inclusion in priority group 2C for eligibility – a rollout we hope to see in the

near future. There has been recognition of the importance of engaging family physicians and their teams in the vaccination campaign – we have a process to express interest and apply to participate in

the vaccination process and there are increasing resources that we can access to educate ourselves and our patients on the vaccinations.

We have seen a proposed negotiated agreement between the AMA and the government which will hopefully allow the profession to move forward from the past couple of years. While there is still advocacy to do, particularly in strengthening the role of the family physician in the health care system, including with strengthening relationships with public health and in providing system support for the medical home, there is at least a stepping stone to continue to move these conversations forward.

The ACFP's Heart of Family Medicine Campaign has been well received by those who have had an opportunity to view it. To increase awareness and support of the role of family physicians, this campaign will now become a media campaign over the next few months, widening viewership through television and online channels.

I appreciate the support and trust of our membership in fulfilling the role of ACFP President. I thank of all of you for your continued commitment and hard work through the various challenges we face. I also thank the ACFP Board for their engagement and support. Finally, I must acknowledge the exceptional hard work and dedication of our ACFP staff, as led by Executive Director Terri Potter, in allowing the organization to continue to represent and meet the needs of our colleagues and patients.

Finally, I thank Dr. Sudha Koppula for stepping up to take on the role of President of the ACFP. While there continues to be advocacy and educational needs that we need to meet, I have no doubt Sudha will be a perfect successor to continue and enhance the strong work the organization has been accomplishing. She brings both clinical and leadership experience to the organization and to this role and I have full faith she will meet the needs of the organization and all of the members we represent.

I thank all of you once again, it has been an honor and a privilege to serve in this role.

Vishal Bhella, MD CCFP
President 2018 – 2021
Alberta College of Family Physicians