



## Calling all family physicians

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Each year at Family Medicine Forum (FMF), the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) holds an open forum to give members a chance to ask questions and share their opinions with our leaders about family practice issues or the College. The information we glean from these forums, member surveys, our website, newsletters, face-to-face interactions, and letters to the editor of *Canadian Family Physician* gives us an idea of family doctors' concerns and helps us determine the College's priorities.

### Family physicians' concerns

The following are some of the questions raised recently by members:

- What is the CFPC saying about the gap in earnings between family physicians and other specialists?
- What is the CFPC doing to help family physicians in their practices? What about family physicians with special-interest practices?
- What are the CFPC's positions on privatization and wait times?
- Is the CFPC addressing members' concerns about the licensing bodies' revalidation and mandatory continuing professional development programs?
- Who is included in the specialty of family medicine?
- How does the CFPC support family medicine researchers?
- Does the CFPC present the concerns of family doctors and their patients to the government?
- What does the CFPC do with all the money it collects from members' annual dues?

Although, only some of the 1500 FMF registrants attend the open forums, informal conversations with attendees also provide us with excellent feedback. Members often stop us in the halls, wanting to talk about something related to their practices, the discipline, the health care system, or the College's policies and programs. These dialogues are important to us, as the topics reflect not only the perspectives of those we meet, but also of family physicians throughout the country. Many provide us with new ideas; some are surprised to discover that the issues they raise are already being addressed or that they soon will be.

### Perceptions

Being challenged to discuss difficult issues is of less concern to College leaders than not being challenged at all. Studies of professional associations confirm that some

members only take notice of an organization's communications or provide feedback when they receive their annual fee notices. We are sensitive to those who feel that value is lacking for the money they spend. We know that even if the criticism is not always valid based on the work actually being carried out, the perception that we are not aware of family doctors' concerns or that we are ineffective as a voice for our members validates the critique.

We are also aware of how hard our members work in their practices, their frustration with the system, and the little time they have to pay attention to the information we try to share with them. Many are just too busy to read our reports or to review *Canadian Family Physician*, Chapter and national College newsletters, or e-News; they don't have time to open the correspondence we send or respond to our questionnaires that help us identify their needs and contribute to the development of our policies; they don't attend Chapter or national College meetings or activities where the very issues they see as priorities are actually being debated. Many members don't even have the time to become familiar with public and medical media stories and reports that highlight positions expressed by CFPC leaders. Unfortunately it becomes a vicious cycle in which a member's lack of time to give attention to what the College is doing or to participate in its activities exacerbates the perception and belief that we aren't acting effectively.

### Participation

To be more effective, we need to hear from more family doctors across Canada and we need them to become more actively involved with us. Fortunately, there are many family physicians who do attend College events and participate on committees and in working groups. Most who participate connect readily with what we do and become important contributors to our programs and policies. One of the things we hear most frequently is how energized they feel as a result of their participation. The most disillusioned physicians are often those who don't become involved with organizations like the CFPC or the medical associations; those who don't give themselves the chance to benefit from the stimulation of interacting and problem solving with colleagues in their local settings and beyond.

We invite our members—and all family physicians in Canada—to strengthen our voice for them and their colleagues in family medicine and to help us be the kind of organization to which they want to belong. Our “forum” is open year-round. Drop in anytime. 🍁