



## Obama and the CFPC

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In 1997 a College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) think tank examined how we could be more effective as the voice of family medicine in Canada. It concluded that our national College and all our Chapters must deliver our messages and programs in a single voice whenever possible. The key message was "We are one."

Throughout his campaign, US President Barack Obama emphasized the importance of the jurisdictions in his country acting as truly "united states" rather than autonomous entities. The theme for his inauguration day was "We are one." We are delighted that America's new leader chose to embrace a CFPC message as his own.

Perhaps in the spirit of Obama, over the past 2 years our national and Chapter presidents, administrators, and executive directors have reviewed the progress we have made in strengthening all parts of our organization and ensuring that we are working as collaboratively and cohesively as possible. They then focused on additional strategies we must now introduce if we are to achieve our objectives in this area. Just as a nation can only achieve its goals if its states or provinces work in harmony with the national leadership and with one another (a message which oft bears repeating for Canada's federal and provincial governments), so too an organization like ours will only be effective if its constituent parts are strong individually and collectively.


The CFPC was established by federal government charter as a single organization with clearly defined parts, each carrying some jurisdictional autonomy but expected to act as a collective with respect to positions and policies. Our constitution established a national board responsible for the development of policies and programs for the benefit of all members across the country. The national board was given the authority to establish Chapters in provinces where defined criteria were met. Today, we have 10 strong Chapters, each with a mandate to carry out activities within its own provincial boundaries. Legally, however, each must also be incorporated with its official title indicating that it is a part of the CFPC (eg, by law, the Manitoba Chapter is the Manitoba College of Family Physicians, a Chapter of the CFPC). Chapter bylaws must comply with national College bylaws; if there are differences, national bylaws take precedence. This constitutional framework allows the College to be a strong and unified voice for family medicine and family physicians in all parts of Canada.

The national board includes directors elected by members of each Chapter. National board directors may also

hold Chapter elected offices but it is not mandatory, and their national board directorships carry fiduciary responsibilities that are separate and distinct. They must have seats on the executives or boards of their Chapters to ensure that Chapter recommendations are brought to the national board and that positions and programs approved by the national board are carried out in each jurisdiction. While it is important that directors bring perspectives to national board meetings that reflect those shared by their Chapter members, each director is expected to make his or her ultimate recommendations and decisions based on what will be best for all College members.

In the past few decades, the roles and responsibilities of the CFPC and its Chapters have increased substantially. Several strategies have been introduced to further strengthen our capacity to act cohesively and effectively:

- increased transfer payments from the CFPC to the Chapters to build staff and committee infrastructures;
- leadership development for committee and board members, including government and media training sessions;
- more national committees that include representatives from every Chapter who together develop policies and programs for the benefit of all members (eg, the Advisory Committee on Family Practice leads CFPC policy formulation related to the changing practice environments of family physicians; the Membership Advisory Committee establishes and monitors the effectiveness of all College programs and activities; and the Continuing Professional Development Committee oversees Mainpro and lifelong learning requirements);
- representation from every Chapter on the Research and Education Foundation board to help develop awards, grants, and scholarships for members all across Canada;
- Web-based and face-to-face programs to ensure that the standards for CME and CPD accreditation are developed and delivered consistently across Canada;
- Family Medicine Forum and Chapter annual scientific assemblies, which bring family physicians from across Canada together to teach and learn, share professional and personal experiences, and help the College develop policies and positions on an array of important issues.

Our members expect us to act as a single organization, with elected and appointed leaders providing strong united messages and activities for family physicians across Canada. We must continue to build and strengthen each part of our organization, but also ensure that we are not acting simply as a number of separate parts. We have helped Obama achieve his objective. Let's hope he will not have to keep reminding us of ours. We are one. 

Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 447.