



Saying yes

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My wife, Gail, often tells me, “No is a full sentence.” Like a lot of family doctors I have been known to overcommit to my career—to my patients, to my hospital, to our discipline, and to trying to improve our health care system. My *modus operandi*: meaning in life comes from making a contribution to others. I hope to leave this world in slightly better shape than I found it.

But life is about balance. You have to know your “first things,”¹ such as caring for yourself and giving time and attention to family and community. Gail helps me maintain a healthy balance to know my first things and to make the right choices for me. Sometimes this involves saying yes.

As my year as CFPC President draws to a close, I have been reflecting on having said yes to this unique privilege and opportunity to contribute to the CFPC and to family medicine—always one of my first things. What if I hadn't said yes to the invitation to join the Executive to replace another member who had to resign suddenly? I did feel an obligation to help the College when they needed me, an organization that had done so much for me during my career and for which I had such high regard. Just like a colleague coming to the aid of another who was unable to meet his or her on-call responsibilities, I wanted to help. Here was the gift of an opportunity to make a unique contribution to my College and to family medicine. Relatively few people ever get such a chance, and I would likely never have the opportunity again. I said yes.

So saying yes allowed me to “ride the wave” and become deeply involved in confronting the challenges, contributing to the solutions, and experiencing the frustrations and successes of improving health care for Canadians by paying specific attention to the value of family physicians and family practice. What a ride it's been! I have learned so much and the term of office is so short. I often joke that I'll finally become a decent President when I'm done.

My teachers have been the incredible people (it really is always about personal relationships) that I have met from coast to coast. My most important teachers have been our patients, like the First Nations survivor of the residential school program I met in Sioux Lookout, Ont. He helped me understand some of the complexities underlying the consequences of the residential school program for our First Nations communities and the ongoing effects on the health and well-being of aboriginal peoples. My belief in the importance of socially accountable family medicine was reinforced 10-fold as I saw with my own eyes the inequities that are so linked to the health of the patients that we manage every day. We have no greater challenge than

addressing these inequities if we are to have an important impact on the health and well-being of Canadians.

I learned from countless family physicians—urban and rural, comprehensive in scope and those more focused, academics and researchers—who shared ideas and solutions about the challenges we face. I saw their dedication and willingness to stand up for their beliefs about how to make our discipline more effective in our role as our patients' most trusted health care providers and advocates. The volunteer members who serve on our many committees, councils, and task forces give the CFPC the credibility to influence universities, government, and sister health care organizations. I learned that our strength is in our diversity and interdependence. And I learned from our younger members—medical students and residents so keen and enthusiastic about family medicine—who amazed me daily with their new, creative, and innovative ideas about the direction our discipline should head.

I have been blessed during my term to have been surrounded by colleagues at the CFPC who have shared their perspectives, ideas, experience, and wisdom to assist and guide the College in these demanding times. We are fortunate to have an incredible senior staff of individuals who unceasingly contribute to the discussions and carry out the actions that have led to so many innovative changes in family medicine, such as the Triple C Competency-based Curriculum and the Patient's Medical Home. Our Executive Committee and Board have taught me to slow down, as they carefully deliberate the nuances of the issues. Past Presidents have guided me with considered perspectives that reveal the subtleties of issues not fully appreciated. Our administrative staff at the College, with their superb organizational skills and work ethic, have taught me the importance of teamwork and accomplishing shared goals.

Last but not least, incredible mentorship and support has been provided by our departing Chief Executive Officer, Dr Cal Gutkin. His guidance, reassurance, and leadership by example are second to none. Two Cal gems: a little humour goes a long way, and, yes, it's all about relationships.

Perhaps the most important life lesson of all, just like in practice, has been the humbling experience of admitting that often you just don't know the answer. But it is wonderful to know you can count on your partners and your team and that together you learn to find your way.

Agreeing to this “ride” as President has been one of the best yeses of my life. I am eternally grateful to have had this chance to give it my best. My final message? Try saying yes once in a while when it feels right. Ride the wave. 🌻

Reference

1. Covey SR, Merrill AR, Merrill RR. *First things first*. Toronto, ON: Simon & Schuster; 1994.

Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 1303.