

A new era

While one chapter concluded for the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) with the retirement of Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Dr Calvin Gutkin, a new one began as Dr Francine Lemire took the helm as Executive Director and CEO on January 1, 2013. In keeping with the Bylaws of the CFPC and its Research and Education Foundation, Dr Lemire's responsibilities will also include her role as CEO of the Research and Education Foundation.



Dr Lemire obtained her medical degree from McGill University and completed her family medicine residency at Memorial University of Newfoundland. She obtained Certification in Family Medicine from the CFPC in 1979 and her Fellowship in 1993. For 23 years, Dr Lemire practised comprehensive family medicine in Corner Brook, Nfld.

Dr Lemire first began to realize the reach, and potential reach, of the CFPC as a professional home for family physician members when she became involved with the executive of the Newfoundland and Labrador Chapter more than 20 years ago. She served as a member of the National Executive Committee of the CFPC and was President of the National College from 1998 to 1999. In 2003 she became Director of Membership with the CFPC, and in 2006 was promoted to Associate Executive Director, Professional Affairs.

While every experience has helped prepare her for the role of Executive Director and CEO, Dr Lemire says the journey of 6 or 7 years serving on the Executive Committee was “an incredible period of learning about the complexity of the organization and where the organization fits in the larger picture of the health care system.” However, true to her roots in family medicine, she weighs her clinical grounding as a family physician as paramount. Until recently, Dr Lemire was a practising family physician. “It’s been a more difficult transition emotionally than I expected it to be. Following people for the little things and big things in their lives over time is very much what defines you as a family physician.”

Dr Lemire is proud to be the first woman to lead the College in this role. Contributing to her taking on this position was the alignment between her own professional values and the values of the organization, strong elected leadership, engaged and committed staff, and a solid legacy left by Dr Gutkin.


Moving forward, Dr Lemire sees the role of the College changing:

During Dr Gutkin’s term, his role was very important in advocating for the fact that we did not have enough family physicians to meet the needs of the population. Over the next few years, we will likely have enough family physicians in terms of numbers to meet population needs, although there will probably be issues around distribution

.... I think that the lens of government and the lens of the public is going to be very much focused on us being able to demonstrate our being useful stewards of the resources that we have—which are not limitless—and being able to demonstrate our effective role in practice.

Dr Lemire realizes that the creation of the new Section of Family Physicians with Special Interests and Focused Practices might create some tension. This notion of special interests is not new. Dr Lemire herself recalls at least 3 different areas of special interest in her own practice that evolved because of community need. “In the best of worlds, I think that areas of special interest should be there to meet the community needs, and you don’t always know the community needs until you begin to work in that community,” says Dr Lemire. The College needs to be a professional home for family physicians with enhanced skills in order for them to act as a resource both to other family physicians and to patients:

We need to get the message out that it is possible, working collaboratively with other professionals, to provide good care to patients, over time, in a comprehensive manner, and still pay proper attention to one’s own personal and family needs. The system needs to be flexible enough to allow some family physicians to develop enhanced skills for professional reasons, while being able to meet community needs as family physicians, and meet societal expectations.

Like a family physician beginning a new practice, there will be a learning curve, but Dr Lemire knows she can count on the valued and continued support of the Executive Committee and the Board, as well as the work of the Chapters and staff, in the transition, and she invites member feedback and engagement. As focus continues to shift toward greater collaboration with initiatives such as the Patient’s Medical Home, Dr Lemire is looking forward to working collectively to write the next chapter for the CFPC. 

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