



## Being a good colleague

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Dear Colleagues,

As the year draws to a close, I want to acknowledge the difficult situation many of us face in terms of support and respect that some messages by decision makers might have conveyed. This said, I also want to celebrate patients' reaffirmation of the value they place on the relationship of trust they have with their family physician.<sup>1</sup> Professionalism is an important dimension of high-quality care. Authors of a *New Zealand Medical Journal* article emphasized its multidimensional nature, and reiterated the importance of time, place, and context or situation in our perception of professionalism and its future evolution.<sup>2</sup> We are increasingly working virtually, and social networking is now an accepted practice. This means a new context, a new time, a need to pay attention to issues such as identity and privacy; it also has an effect on how we relate to our patients and to our colleagues.<sup>2</sup> Is a learner or a practitioner ever "off duty" in relation to professional behaviour? With respect to interaction with colleagues, what does it mean to be a good colleague today?

Participants at the Canadian Medical Association's recent General Council and Annual Meeting provided the following feedback on this topic: there is increasing discord and incivility within the profession; this emerging culture is not actively discouraged within medicine; and there are perceived differences in the relative value placed on this (or attached to this) by specialties, which in turn undermines the profession's shared contributions.<sup>3</sup> Participants spoke of a culture of infallibility permeating the profession; of individual and system-level barriers contributing to this; of the influence of stigma in not seeking out support and resources. They commented on generational shifts in perspectives on what affects patient care and work-life integration.<sup>3</sup> There was consensus that we need to pay attention to this, individually and collectively; that collegiality improves collaboration and ultimately improves patient care<sup>3,4</sup>; that healthy physicians lead to better care; that mentorship and mutual learning is valued but underdeveloped and not effectively leveraged; and that we need to work toward unifying the profession around a shared purpose and identity.<sup>3</sup>

In the book *The Little Book of Lykke: the Danish Search for the World's Happiest People*,<sup>5</sup> author Meik Wiking, Chief Executive Officer of the Happiness Research Institute in

Copenhagen, Denmark, describes togetherness (or social support) as one of the most important of the 6 factors considered essential for a high quality of life.<sup>5</sup> At a recent presentation in Toronto, Ont, Wiking asked his audience participants to consider if they had someone in their network whom they could "rely on in times of need."<sup>6</sup> A questionnaire for physicians by the *BC Medical Journal* asked physicians, "What do you most value in your colleagues?" Some BC physicians described collegiality as the most important quality (grouped with friendship, willingness to help, team player, and loyalty). The next important qualities were honesty, compassion, and communication. While I agree with all of these, I was most impressed with the author's own top choices for the qualities he valued most in colleagues: dependability, as now more than ever, it is important to be able to count on each other in providing the best care for patients (this includes having a well organized office, following through on one's commitments, and arriving on time); curiosity and a willingness to question the status quo in a constructive way; and a willingness to teach. Teaching is a commitment that is not well remunerated; when managing a busy office, teaching can put us behind and force us, at times, to miss important personal and family events. Yet, when well done, the influence of this value on current and future practising physicians has no bounds.<sup>7</sup>

As 2017 comes to an end, let us celebrate the good colleagues in our lives. We do hope for the next year to be fulfilling in meaningful personal and professional interactions. On behalf of all of us at the CFPC, best wishes for the holiday season and 2018. 🍁

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### References

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Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 975.