

## Scotiabank and CFPC: time for a frank talk

Scotiabank and the College of Family Physicians of Canada have a mutually beneficial relationship. Scotiabank's brand and image is enhanced by its high-profile association with Canada's family physicians, from whom it also hopes to recruit clients. The College uses the money it receives in bank largesse (more than \$5 million to date) to fund medical student scholarships, launch prevention and patient education initiatives, and provide a variety of grants and awards to physicians.

While some family physicians were uncomfortable with this cozy arrangement, there was no great outcry. It's hard to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Recently it was revealed that Scotiabank, together with 2 other big Canadian banks, TD and Royal Bank, is among the funders of the consortium that is building and will be operating the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL)—the pipeline that would channel fracked oil from North Dakota across 4 states and ultimately to refineries on the Gulf of Mexico.

Unlike TD, Scotiabank is not directly funding construction of DAPL. But the record shows that it has provided \$100 million of credit to Sunoco Logistics, one of the family of Energy Transfer companies that will operate the pipeline after its completion.<sup>1-5</sup>

Indigenous peoples and the environmental movement argue that DAPL would devastate sacred burial grounds and endanger water, land, and wildlife along its route through the Missouri River basin.

This fall saw a dramatic confrontation at Standing Rock Sioux Reservation between peaceful protesters and armed authorities. Protesters faced down company guards with attack dogs and militarized police unleashing tear gas, concussion grenades, and water jets in sub-zero weather. No one was killed, but several protesters were seriously injured.

The outgoing US president, Barack Obama, eventually ordered a halt to DAPL's construction. One of Donald Trump's first acts after his inauguration was to order a resumption of work on the pipeline.

The battle at Standing Rock links 3 issues: defending the rights of indigenous communities, protecting local and regional ecosystems, and addressing the global warming threat to the planet as a whole.

Investing in the projects of the oil industry, such as DAPL, will lock us into fossil fuel dependency for decades to come. Scotiabank and the other banks are driven by profit and are therefore heedless of long-term consequences. Not so for the College.

The College is a signatory to "Doctors for Climate Action," a statement submitted to COP21 (the 2015 United Nations climate change conference), held in Paris, France. That conference asked its participants to commit to limiting the rise in global temperature to 1.5°C. The College

assisted 2 of its Atlantic chapters to oppose fracking in New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador. So it is not the case that the College leaves action for others.

Effective action to meet the climate emergency will require profound debate and concerted political action throughout society. Family physicians are not going to save the world, but we do have a special responsibility, if only because we will be on the front lines in helping people deal with the health consequences of global warming.

What is the College's responsibility, given Scotiabank's complicity in an ecologically damaging project?

We believe the College's official commitments to "social accountability" and viewing issues through a "social justice lens" mandate action on this front.

The College should pressure Scotiabank to divest from new fossil fuel infrastructure projects, starting with DAPL. That implies a potential rupture with our favoured banking partner. However, if the College is resolute, this approach might meet with success. In any case, in circumstances that threaten the planet and human communities, it is the only course of action that is socially responsible and for which we can be answerable to future generations.

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### Competing interests

None declared

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## Response

**W**e thank the signatories for sharing their thoughtful, respectful, and well-articulated argument.

We also thank them for acknowledging the College of Family Physicians of Canada's actions to address climate change and environmental health. Indeed, one of the letter's signatories is a member of our Environmental Health Resource Group and we will benefit from his wise counsel.

To date, Scotiabank has been a valuable supporter of family medicine. As the letter writers point out, in the past 20 years, Scotiabank has contributed more than \$5 million to a range of activities including medical student scholarships, continuing professional development grants, patient education and prevention initiatives, and a variety of awards and benefits for family physicians, particularly those at the beginning of their careers.

We recognize that banks rely on a multitude of investments and that not all of our members will agree with some of the investment directions. However, given the above, we do think that family medicine, especially young family doctors, have benefitted greatly from Scotiabank's support.

We believe that other organizations, such as the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, are better positioned to focus on and advocate for environmental issues.

Where we have a mandate, the College of Family Physicians of Canada will continue to speak on behalf of its members with respect to environmental issues.

—David White MD CCFP FCFP  
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—Francine Lemire MD CM CCFP FCFP CAE  
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Sudbury, Ont

### Competing interests

Dr White is President of the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC),

Dr Lemire is Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of the CFPC, and

Dr Cervin is Chair of the Foundation for Advancing Family Medicine at the CFPC

## Choosing Wisely Canada

I thank the College of Family Physicians of Canada President, Dr David White, for his thoughtful message in the February 2017 issue.<sup>1</sup> In discussing the "delicate