



## Caring for one another

Francine Lemire MDCM CCFP FCFP CAE ICD.D, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Dear Colleagues,

Reflecting on 2019, one must acknowledge our dynamic environment, not only in family practice, but in society as a whole: climate change, uprisings, a federal election that became personal and reactive, and negative interactions between groups of people that were often amplified in the media, including on social media. This is the context in which we care for people, and our patients superimpose on this the specifics of their lives and their hope that we will accompany them on their health care journey.

We are also faced with a high burnout rate in the medical profession, with family medicine being a discipline where this is felt most (a 2012 US study suggested 38% of physicians were burned out, compared with 28% of nonphysicians<sup>1</sup>; the 2018 National Physician Health Survey's estimate of physician burnout is 30%<sup>2</sup>; a recent study in *Canadian Family Physician* suggested it could range as high as 73% among family medicine residents<sup>3</sup>). Perceived lack of autonomy and difficult relationships with supervisors are important factors associated with burnout in any profession. The culture in medicine of perfectionism, fear of potential effects of medical errors, demands associated with electronic medical record documentation, increasing paperwork, and dated, burdensome administrative processes contribute to a sense of loss of control and worry about never being able to catch up.

We need to pay attention to the fourth part of the quadruple aim,<sup>4</sup> the well-being of providers, if we want to positively affect patient care. I believe caring for one another is part of the solution, and that there are strategies to consider at the individual, team, and system levels.


Food and sleep are at the base of Maslow's hierarchy of needs<sup>5</sup>; these needs must be addressed to reach higher levels of creativity, problem solving, and learning. Regular exercise, self-awareness, and reflection all have a positive effect on mental health. Each time we board a plane, we are reminded that caring for someone begins with care of oneself: "Put your own oxygen mask on first." I add to this: make sure you have your own family doctor.

Think about an initiative that would have been impossible to accomplish without a team. To be successful, one needs to get to know team members, appreciate the scope of their work, and connect regularly. Have regular team meetings, which can be formal (eg, rounds) or informal (eg, regular morning huddles). Routine is important and so is celebration of milestones and accomplishments.

Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 935.

The CFPC advocates for health care environment improvement as the voice of family medicine in our own right and in collaboration with others. As a standard-setter for postgraduate training programs, we have been active in improving duty hours for residents. Through accreditation, we worked to improve policies around harassment and violence, and accommodation in the learning environment. The foundations element of the 2019 Patient's Medical Home vision<sup>6</sup> speaks to the need for infrastructure support, facilitation of practice transformation, electronic medical record integration with other data systems, and scaling up clinical innovations such as eConsult to reduce barriers to information and to other specialist care. I realize how challenging it is to advocate for such change at the regional or provincial level. We can all help by recognizing and supporting those champions who are working hard to improve the situation. I hope that, over time, we can all adopt a degree of autoregulation in our communication with colleagues, stop thinking in terms of "us versus them," and take ownership of a better way forward. That is not to say that criticism, feedback, input, or suggestions are frowned upon; they should be welcomed. They signal our engagement with improving learning and work environments, and care overall.

A word about "work-life" balance. Reference to this often suggests that work is separate from life, and by inference, that pleasure is confined to life. I hope that 2020 brings us to a place where work and life are not competing with each other, but rather are connected and become sources of simultaneous personal and professional satisfaction. I suggest reading the articles listed below that inspired this column.<sup>7-11</sup>

Best wishes to you and yours for the holiday season and 2020 from all of us at the CFPC. 

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