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MEDICAL STAFF
ASSOCIATIONS
IN NOVA SCOTIA

PRIMER

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Introduction

Medical staff associations (MSAs) help to facilitate a professional and collaborative work environment that actively engages physicians in health-system planning. Across Canada, MSAs have been growing and helping advocate for physician inclusion in all matters that govern the practice of medicine, facilitate communication with health-system partners, and bring the voice of physicians and the communities they serve to all levels of decision-making within the health-care system.

Robust, active, MSAs already exist in some communities of Nova Scotia, but in other areas they have yet to be established. There are presently no formal zonal MSAs. This presents an opportunity: establishing new or developing MSAs within Nova Scotia's health-care system, at the community or zonal level, would provide many opportunities for the province's physicians to become more involved in provincial health-care decisions.

Doctors Nova Scotia (DNS) is committed to supporting its members as they work to establish or improve MSAs in their communities. As part of that commitment, DNS commissioned this primer and an in-depth tool kit, and has developed a grant program to help physicians in communities establish or grow an existing MSA.

The MSA tool kit

To assist physician leaders who wish to establish an MSA, or who want to help their current MSA evolve, DNS has developed *Medical Staff Associations in Nova Scotia: A tool kit* to guide physicians through the process.

The MSA tool kit is not a one-size-fits-all solution – its components can be used in any combination to assist in the MSA development or modification process.

The tool kit includes:

- A guide to developing terms of reference, and a sample/template for customization
- An overview of and a guide to developing operational processes
- Items to consider when developing MSA policies, and a sample policy (template)
- A guide to forming useful MSA subcommittees

Download the tool kit at doctorsNS.com > Contract & Practice Support > Tool Kits for Physicians > Medical Staff Associations.

What is a medical staff association?

A medical staff association (MSA) is an independent, organized group of practising physicians who work together in a community, medical facility or (in Nova Scotia) zone. The primary purpose of any MSA is to represent and advance the interests of its members, their patients and the health-care system.

Ideally, an MSA comprises a united group of physicians who recognize the importance of building a strong and sustainable health-care system, modelling and sustaining a positive environment for physicians, and providing the highest-quality patient care.

Medical staff associations are not part of the NSHA or IWK admin-

istrative structure or Doctors Nova Scotia (DNS). While there could be several community MSAs in any given zone, the current provincial medical staff bylaws stipulate that there will be four zonal medical staff associations (ZMSAs) in Nova Scotia; one for each of the northern, eastern, western and central zones.

An MSA's objectives include promoting and advancing its members' involvement in the provision of medical services within each community or zone, and representing and advocating for the interests of its members. The operation and structure of an MSA are created, approved and adopted by its members.

The medical staff bylaws are clear about how MSAs relate to the health authorities, but there is no specific mechanism or framework for developing an MSA. To be truly successful in transforming Nova Scotia's health-care system, the physicians who are working on the front lines of health care and who understand the needs of the community and the zone in which they practise must be ably represented. Medical staff associations across the province have the potential to foster physician engagement, build a spirit of collaboration and promote the common goal of health-system transformation.

What does a medical staff association do for its members?

Historically, the work of MSAs ranged from casual (such as focusing on creating a collegial work atmosphere and social activities) to more serious (providing medical education, advocating for members' interests with the health authorities).

Medical staff associations also:

- Provide a forum for physicians to address issues in their facility, community or zone
- Facilitate communication between medical staff and the

zone medical authority

- Represent the interests of the medical staff and the community to each zone medical advisory committee (ZMAC)
- Advise on physician recruitment
- Advocate for members in their interactions with the NSHA, the IWK, the Department of Health and Wellness (DHW), the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia and DNS
- Ensuring policies, procedures and due process are followed

- Enhance members' professional and personal quality of life
- Promote and support continuing medical education and physician leadership development
- Promote workplaces that value integrity, research, learning, teaching, clinical excellence and communication
- Model and sustain a positive physician culture
- Organize and promote social functions for members

What is required to establish a medical staff association?

The crucial ingredient of an MSA is people – a group of physicians united by geography and a sense of purpose. Once the membership has been established and an executive has been elected, the MSA needs:

- Terms of reference
- Policies and processes
- Mechanisms for managing member dues

How are medical staff associations structured?

Because many of the province’s MSAs originated independently, each one has a slightly different organizational structure. Generally, MSA members elect an Executive Committee, which is responsible for decision-making and running the association.

Following the development of the NSHA medical staff bylaws, the members of many of the current MSAs worked together to develop a structure for MSAs in Nova Scotia that complements the NSHA administrative structure and is compatible with the NSHA bylaws.

READ the medical staff bylaws at novascotia.ca/just/regulations/regs/hamedstaff.htm

Joining a community- or facility-based MSA allows physicians the opportunity to influence health-system decision making at a local, zonal and provincial level.

What is the role of Doctors Nova Scotia?

Although MSAs exist independently of DNS, the association is committed to supporting their work. Doctors Nova Scotia may support an MSA in a number of ways, including:

- Developing governance processes and policies
- Collecting and administering dues
- Supporting your communication needs
- Providing help with advocacy, media training and government relations
- Improving physician engagement and leadership development
- Connecting groups of physicians with common issues
- Providing financial support (see “What’s next?” below)

If your MSA needs support with any of the above, contact your DNS Physician Advisor (tinyurl.com/DNSphysicianadvisors) to get started.

What’s next?

In addition to providing the MSA tool kit for its members, Doctors Nova Scotia has a limited number of financial grants available to support the formation or development of community- or zone-based MSAs. If your MSA would benefit from a grant, fill out the application form or contact your DNS Physician Advisor for more information.

DOWNLOAD the grant application at doctorsNS.com > Contract & Practice Support > Tool Kits for Physicians > Medical Staff Associations.