

Members' Forum
June 12, 2021 AGM
via Zoom
NOTES

Doctors Nova Scotia (DNS) held a Members' Forum following the Annual General Meeting. Each year, the Board of Directors hosts an open forum for members to discuss activities and/or issues that are of interest and relevant to them with the DNS Board of Directors and senior staff.

Dr. André Bernard, chair of the Board of Directors and facilitator for the Forum, noted that the Board of Directors will review the matters raised at their next meeting and determine what action is required, if any. He opened the floor to questions from members in attendance.

PSP supports

There was a discussion regarding the Professional Support Program (PSP) and the supports available around relationship fostering. The pandemic has exacerbated this issue within the medical profession. Although this is an area that the PSP can offer some support as well as outsource support, it was suggested that we might want to consider facilitating access to professionals who specialize in this area so that members have more efficient and timely access.

The chair noted that the issue of intra-professional matters in medicine is something that has become more evident over the past year. The supports available through the PSP in this regard may not be agile or substantive enough to respond to the demand.

Ms. MacCready-Williams, CEO, shared that Dr. John Chiasson, Director of the PSP, often runs into access challenges when he looks to refer physicians for psychological support. This is the direct result of the demand in the system right now. There is an initiative with the CMA through Morneau Shepell that will be offering some enhanced psychological services, which may be helpful, however this is a bigger systemic issue that needs solving. We may be able to explore the ability to contract certain professionals to allow us to give members more timely access to these supports.

A staff member noted that DNS is also working with the Fountain of Youth on this front; they've received some CMA Affinity funding and one of the outcomes of that is creating a directory of specialists that we would be able to refer physicians to through the PSP. We're hoping to get that up and running by the fall, but there are some systems issues that will need to be sorted out.

Administrative burden

A member expressed concern about family physicians working long unpaid hours to complete paperwork and consultation requests. It was suggested that there be a new fee code put in place for referral requests and forms that compensates for the level of detail that work requires.

It was noted that many specialists are wanting more details submitted with consultation requests so that they can increase the quality of care for their patients, but it requires completion of lengthy forms by the referring physician.

Locum support

A member raised concerns around the lack of local support for sudden illness coverage for physicians. It was suggested that DNS look at setting up a virtual locum support initiative where physicians can sign up to assist a colleague who deals with complex patient care, mental health issues, opioid use for chronic pain, etc.

The member inquired as to whether there has been any interest from Dalhousie to provide assistance in the community. This is an important aspect of supporting doctors, during and after the pandemic.

Ms. Alana Patterson, Director of Physician Compensation and Practice Support, explained that in the last round of negotiations we attempted to look for some enhancements to the locum program, however there was no interest in that at the time. We plan to pursue this again in the next negotiations. At this point, we haven't explored the virtual care element of it as that is a newer development for Nova Scotia. We've also just launched a new strategic plan, and we had not contemplated this work so it's something that will require consideration in terms of funding and resourcing. Ms. Patterson acknowledged that we are hearing more and more from physicians who are expressing their intention to step away from practice post COVID-19, so the need for that local support is going to become greater.

It was suggested that perhaps we could explore a virtual mechanism such as an app where physicians could view locum listings across the province and be matched to an opportunity of interest in various communities. This would likely appeal to the younger generation of physicians as well.

Adjournment

In closing, the chair thanked everyone for their engagement and for raising these important issues. He invited physicians to reach out to himself, the Board, or staff at any time with any additional concerns or questions. He also thanked staff for their ongoing efforts on behalf of the province's physicians.

The Members' Forum adjourned at 1:02 pm.