

May 5, 2020

UCP Attempt to Bust the Alberta Medical Association

The United Conservative Party is attempting to bust the Alberta Medical Association and we, physicians, will not stand for this. The AMA has existed for over 100 years. It will outlast the short term of this foolish government because we decide who represents us, not government. The AMA always has been, and will continue to be, our representing body for physician rights and compensation.

We are well aware of the disastrous but deliberate attempt by the UCP to divide and conquer the AMA. The various targeted cuts to healthcare are an attempt to split rural against urban, specialists against generalists, and administrators against clinicians. Why did the UCP force through deep targeted cuts that impact certain physicians more than others when the AMA offered a smooth alternative of 5% cuts across the whole profession? The offer by the AMA would achieve budget targets while not impacting care or one physician more than another. This is a malicious attempt to split the profession.

The UCP has also cut funding for programs delivered by the AMA as member benefits. The government has taken over the administration of the Medical Liability Reimbursement program from the AMA. This program reimbursed members for Canadian Medical Protective Association and malpractice insurance. The government has also reduced the benefit. Previously, every physician paid the first \$1,000 and the government grant covered the balance. Now physicians pay \$1,200 to \$4,000. The UCP has also completely axed the Continuing Medical Education member benefit. This program reimbursed AMA members up to \$2,684 per year for the costs incurred with maintaining and enhancing professional knowledge, skills and competency. Removing the administration and cutting funding for these programs is a direct attempt by the UCP to devalue membership of the AMA.

This government underestimates how their antagonizing has provoked our collective anger, frustration, and distress to further bond us as colleagues. The AMA continues to provide benefit by pursuing a lawsuit against this government on behalf of all of us. We continue to receive the value of the AMA's support with managing our practices. We continue to be members of the AMA because together we are stronger as a cohesive unit. Together we pool our communal resources and support each other. The AMA remains as our representing organization because we decide who represents us.

The Minister of Health has lost the respect and trust of physicians. An attack on the AMA is an attack on all of us. This key relationship is severely damaged. We need a respectful partner who honours collaboration rather than a divide and conquer strategy.

We will not be shaken by these UCP deliberate and malicious attempts to break our representation. #AMAisABdocs is popular for a reason. Thank you to all my colleagues who have not wavered in placing patients first in these challenging weeks. Professionalism and compassion will always win in the long run. We choose the AMA to represent and fight for us.

Dr. Ernie Schuster, President of the Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association
Dr. Scott Beach, President of the Calgary and Area Medical Staff Society
Dr. Edmund Barker, President of the Central Zone Medical Staff Association
Dr. Craig Hodgson, President of the North Zone Medical Staff Association
Dr. Fredrykka Rinaldi, President of the South Zone Medical Staff Association
Dr. Alayne Farries, Chair of the Council of Zonal Leaders