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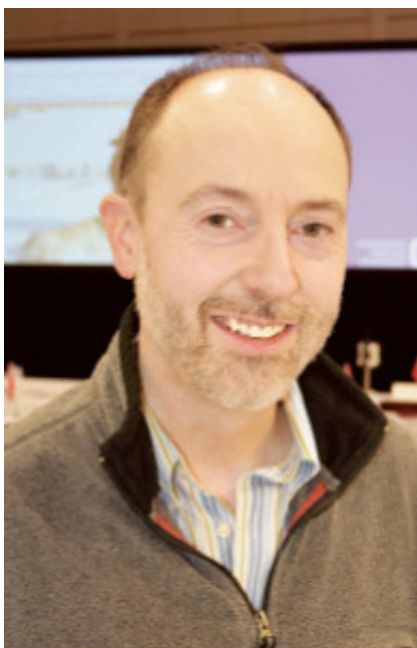
Attempted BCMA 'reboot' doesn't pass

Written by Ann Graham Walker on May 13, 2013 for [The Medical Post](#)

Bid to shrink board to 15 members loses vote, but reformist doctors vow to continue effort

A member-led attempt to drastically shrink and thoroughly restructure the British Columbia Medical Association board has failed.

While the bid to shrink the board to 15 members from 37, while redrawing 15 geographic districts into five, fell short of the votes needed in the April 25 ballot, the result wasn't without intrigue.



The board is going to have to change from the inside, assisted by—or despite—our efforts, or it will be changed from the outside. Either, or both, will work. —Dr. James Busser

Two Vancouver physicians—internist Dr. James Busser and family physician Dr. Charles Webb—brought forward the proposed organizational “reboot” in two bylaw amendments.

While both are elected members of the BCMA board executive—Dr. Webb as the chairman of the general assembly and Dr. Busser as the honorary secretary-treasurer—they made their pitch at a grassroots level

through member-authored bylaw amendments, rather than through a general referendum.

Both physicians have long believed the BCMA board is unwieldy, autocratic and poor at representing physician interests. Their promise to voters last spring was to change that.



Dr. Ross

But after seven months as board insiders, they decided their goals would be better served outside the board process.

While about 11,000 physicians are BCMA members, the proposed bylaw changes pulled in only a small number of votes.

In total, 1,328 votes were cast online (see sidebar), with 668 physicians voting for the restructuring bylaw and 660 voting against it—a result that fell short of the 75% required to change a bylaw.

In an interview with the Medical Post, BCMA president Dr. Shelley Ross said the outcome represents the will of the majority, since the vast majority of eligible voters decided not to cast a vote.

“We think (the ‘Yes’ vote) represents a very small percentage of members,” she said.

During the referendum, Dr. Ross sent a letter to BCMA members urging a vote against the changes, which she described as “drastic.”

Her note also stated that while “it is important for the board to periodically review its size and determine the right composition for it to carry out its work in an effective, inclusive and representative manner, that process is a complex one requiring expert and member consultation.”

The letter also stated that shrinking the number of districts and delegates would leave the Northern Region of approximately 500 physicians with “the same representation on the board as the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, with approximately 3,400 physicians.”

Meanwhile, in interviews and correspondence with the Medical Post, as well as in communications faxed to doctors’ offices during the referendum, Drs. Webb and Busser alleged that Dr. Ross’s letter contained erroneous interpretations.

Communications criticized

They also alleged the BCMA’s communications about the referendum were heavily loaded with the president’s views, with only an embedded web link (within the president’s letter) to their own page offering an opposing view.

The pair added that BCMA members also received a flurry of emails urging a “No” vote from the societies representing family physicians and specialists, and from a number of regional delegates who saw the proposed restructuring as the potential undoing of the BCMA.

By contrast, Drs. Webb and Busser said they did not have corresponding access to the BCMA email database to clarify what they believed to be misrepresentations and unfair criticisms.

Dr. Busser took issue with the contention that the large number of members who did not vote can be taken as supporters for the "No" side. "Voter apathy could well be the product of years of disenchantment and disenfranchisement, or it could be a sign of great contentment (with) the status quo," he said. "It could be either, but such speculation seems to be beside the point when a majority of those who did vote, voted for change."

Dr. Webb also weighed in: "In my view, this referendum represents a tipping point. Despite the president, board delegates and two societies powerfully campaigning against our reforms, the majority of the voting membership failed to support their effort. Given the unequal capacity of two members to communicate across the entire profession, this vote supporting change is a clear indicator that a large part of the membership is unhappy with the way in which the BCMA represents them."

The pair intend to continue their efforts. They are currently fighting a re-election battle for the executive positions—the only two executive positions being challenged in the current election. All the other board positions this year, except for one delegate position, are being passed by acclamation.

"The board is going to have to change from the inside, assisted by—or despite—our efforts, or it will be changed from the outside. Either, or both, will work," said Dr. Busser. **MP**

BCMA first to adopt e-voting

The April 25 British Columbia Medical Association referendum on structural reorganization was just the third run-through of its newly adopted method of e-voting.

(The first being a couple of bylaw referendums completed earlier this year.)

The BCMA says it's the first medical association in Canada to switch from paper ballots to computers. "As you would expect when learning anything new, there is a learning curve associated with it," said BCMA spokeswoman Sharon Shore, in an email exchange with the Medical Post. "However, the process is pretty easy so there wasn't much hand-holding. As with any tool that's more progressive than its predecessor, we believe the benefits of e-voting outweigh the concerns."

The BCMA said 1,328 members voted in the structural referendum. That's fewer than the 2,416 who cast paper ballots around this time last year, when proposed term limits for BCMA board members went to a referendum. But it is significantly more than the approximately 750 who participated in the first BCMA e-vote in February.

However, some doctors had problems logging in, and there was confusion because the ballots did not come into doctors' inboxes with the BCMA as the sender. Instead, emails came from an account called "Everyone Counts Canada" at a time when physicians were completing their tax returns, and as British Columbia is entering a provincial election. An unknown number of doctors may have unintentionally deleted their ballots or the ballots may have ended up in doctors' spam bins.

Doctors also had to follow email links, input the last four digits of their Social Insurance Numbers and input a designated PIN (emailed to them) before they got to the substance of what they were voting on. In time, the hope is that physician participation in referendums and elections will increase.—*Ann Graham Walker*