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Big reform coming to BCMA if members pass proposed bylaw

Written by Ann Graham Walker on February 11, 2013 for [The Medical Post](#)

But will the BCMA make the change?

VANCOUVER | Drs. James Busser and Charles Webb, leaders of British Columbia Doctors for a Democratic Future (BCDDF), have introduced a bylaw amendment that—if passed by the membership this spring—would restructure the British Columbia Medical Association right down to its socks.

Dr. Busser presented the amendment at the Jan. 11 BCMA board meeting and later told the *Medical Post* it received “a high level of interest.”

While there’s been no official response from the BCMA, the amendment proposes numerous major reforms, including a plan to collapse the current 16 districts into five, exactly mirroring the provincial health authorities. That change would give BCMA delegates direct, parallel input into health authority decision-making.

The de-bulking of the board would also bring down director fees, from \$800,000 to \$325,000—money that could go into other BCMA areas. Another key change is that all district delegates and vice-delegates—four vice-delegates per new district—would be elected.

Out of each district’s total of five elected delegates, the amendment requires that at least two be GPs and at least two be specialists—an effort to bring the BCMA in touch with its membership. Currently, the board has only seven specialists among its 29 delegates, said Dr. Busser.

Dr. Webb said the amendment took the BCMA by complete surprise:

“I have had private feedback since Jim’s announcement to the board that there may have been some shock-value in the sudden appearance of these proposals.”

However, the reforms are consistent with everything on their [website](#). Plus, last year, Dr. Busser proposed term limits for board members. In the ensuing referendum, the proposed reform didn’t get the 75% support it needed to pass—but it got 60%, despite an arguably self-serving letter from the BCMA board advising doctors to vote against it.

While Drs. Webb and Busser are board insiders now—the pair became elected members last spring—they have chosen to initiate reforms through a bylaw amendment rather than through their newly-acquired executive powers.

Dr. Webb said reform is something “best left for to the members to decide—keeping contention out of the board room, especially where conflict of interest could be an issue.”

Despite the election of some BCDDF-supported candidates last year, much of the board is made up of long-

established, unelected delegates. Dr. Webb expressed concern that such a board “might obfuscate the process.”

Drs. Busser and Webb’s one-year terms on the executive expire in May, and they want to make sure there isn’t a repeat of last year’s term-limit blocking. Under existing BCMA bylaws, referendum ballots must be distributed to the BCMA’s 10,000 or so voting members by April 30. If 75% vote in favour, the restructuring will become mandatory.
