

Doctor group looks to renew democracy on BCMA board

Written by Ann Graham Walker on May 10, 2012 for CanadianHealthcareNetwork.ca

VANCOUVER – A new campaign banner has emerged in this year's British Columbia Medical Association elections. "B.C. Doctors for a Democratic Future" is an initiative to flag BMCA candidates who are seen as more likely to be pro-democracy.

BCDDF has historical roots in recent battles between the BCMA and its membership, dating back to the heated debates on the floor of the 2007 annual general meeting, when angry attendees introduced resolutions calling for improved board transparency. And in 2009, the BCDDF garnered more than 1,000 signatures on a petition to persuade the BCMA board to resolve its conflict with a dissenting member through mediation and negotiation, rather than through costly legal channels.

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BCDDF re-emerged this spring [online](#), with a slate of candidates, a statement of values and a strong position on term limits for BCMA board members. (The BCDDF is for term limits; the BCMA board is against them.)

Vancouver family practitioner Dr. Charles Webb, a BCDDF candidate for chairman of the general assembly in the current elections, told the *Medical Post* in an interview the group wants to spark a "call to engagement of the silent majority who tend to not vote.

"We hope to tap into the ether of a spirit for change that, according to our feedback, does truly exist in the membership," Dr. Webb said.

Fellow BCDDF member, Vancouver internist Dr. Jim Busser, is running for the position of BCMA honorary secretary treasurer. The two doctors spent four years as district representatives on the board (2008-2011). They said the BCMA is run more or less as an oligarchy, with long-term incumbents and a propensity for secrecy.

Drs. Webb and Busser are equally concerned with the way the membership enables this status quo, through lack of participation in elections and general apathy.

BCDDF has endorsed candidates in all the contested positions—not through any formal political process. "We've talked to the candidates a lot," said Dr. Busser. The group has also organized a town hall meeting that can be viewed online, and is reaching people at grassroots level.

"In last year's BCMA elections, only 10% of the Vancouver membership voted. What if we manage to start turning that around?" asked Dr. Busser.

"Our message to doctors is, 'Pay attention, engage and start making meaningful decisions or forever have health authorities and government do it for you,'" said Dr. Webb.

He said that within the silent majority of non-voting members throughout the province there are many who seek a "spirit of change."

"Really, the most important outcome for me will not be whether or not I become the new Chair of the General Assembly," said Dr. Webb. "It will be seeing whether significantly larger numbers of doctors turned out to vote. If that happens, I will be very happy."

The ballots are being tallied May 23.
