
President's Letter

October 18, 2018



Tracey Bridger
MD, FRCP(C)
President

NLMA to represent academic physicians

Dear Colleagues:

I wish to inform you about a new initiative of the NLMA to represent and negotiate on behalf of our members who hold academic and teaching positions with Memorial University.

The NLMA has traditionally focused on negotiating "clinical" compensation for its members with the government, WorkplaceNL, and periodically with other parties. We have not heretofore negotiated academic compensation with Memorial University. However, recent actions by Memorial University and the provincial government have highlighted the need to move into the academic space to protect our members' interests.

Academic physicians include more than the 120-140 full time positions. There are also many physicians who perform specific tasks for the Faculty for stipends, and many more who provide teaching services to the faculty without compensation. All told, there are hundreds of physicians who provide services to Memorial University.

Educating new students and residents is regarded as part of a doctor's professional responsibility and many physicians engage in these activities during the course of their career. Each and every doctor would expect to be treated with respect and fairly compensated for these services. They would not expect the University or the government to exert their power in a way that disadvantages physicians or treats them inconsistently.

This year Memorial University unilaterally terminated the GFT payment model and introduced a new form of stipend payment in which new full time physicians will no longer be University employees and will receive substantially less income than their colleagues hired in previous years. While this arrangement is an interim one, it shows the imbalance in power that occurs when a binding comprehensive agreement is not in place. If an agreement was in place with the NLMA, any change would have to be negotiated and could not be imposed unilaterally by the University.

This year as well, we have seen the provincial government direct the Health Authorities to unilaterally and significantly reduce the "payments in lieu of benefits" to academic physicians in relation to their clinical pay. The NLMA has obtained a legal opinion regarding the validity of this action and we have confirmed it is a breach of the MOA. Currently we are seeking a negotiated solution, but we will take legal action soon if necessary. While this matter is clinical, not academic, it shows how exposed physicians are when a large organization, whether the government or the university, perceives that the contracts of physicians are not protected.

We have written academic physicians directly about our intentions and we have invited them to meetings in the next few weeks. If you are an academic physician performing services for Memorial University and you have not received a separate email from me, please let us know by sending an email to nlma@nlma.nl.ca. (Please tell us: your full name; the position title, or role or service you provide to the Faculty of Medicine; and whether you are compensated by Memorial University with a salary or a stipend or whether you are non-compensated.)

As always I appreciate your feedback and questions on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tracey Bridger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tracey Bridger, M.D., FRCP(C)
President