

President's Letter

May 4, 2021



Lynette Powell, MD
President

NLMA resuming negotiations with government

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to advise that after the delay associated with the provincial election, the NLMA will resume MOA negotiations with the provincial government on Wednesday, May 5.

As you know, the last MOA expired in 2017 and we are now more than halfway through the fourth year without a new contract. The last MOA continues in effect until we reach a new agreement. Initial negotiating meetings started just before Christmas but were suspended in January.

Given the many delays, important problems that should be addressed in negotiations remain unresolved. Patient care continues to suffer in all regions of the province due to long wait times and bottlenecks. Many of our hospitals, both rural and urban, suffer from a critical lack of physicians in various disciplines such as family medicine, internal medicine, pathology, cardiac surgery and neurology. Many sites outside St. John's lack adequate cardiology, dermatology, pediatrics, psychiatry and obstetrical services, among others. We still have about 90,000 people in the province without a family doctor, which is contributing to poor health outcomes and unnecessary hospital utilization. Recent physician resignations in the province will make matters worse unless new physicians can be recruited here. Unfortunately, this province has the worst record in the country for retaining its own medical graduates.

We need meaningful solutions to improve recruitment of doctors to address our current shortages and future demands. However, the high burden of call, the inability to entice locums to provide relief and uncompetitive remuneration is hampering these efforts and forcing the system to perpetually respond to service gaps and crisis. The people of this province expect and deserve permanent solutions. The negotiations table is where we plan to address these issues. We expect the government to be ready to engage with us so that we can make up for the lost time.

I have advised the Ministers of Health and Finance that the NLMA wishes to be a constructive partner with government in addressing these challenges. We are also willing to work with government to grapple with the ongoing fiscal challenges within the health sector. Most recently, the NLMA launched a series of comprehensive consultations with members and presented recommendations to the government on the issues under examination by Health Accord NL. A sustainable health care system is a goal we all share and the NLMA is committed to continuing to participate in this process. We also intend to submit proposals at the negotiations table that will lead to systemic improvements and better health outcomes, which will ultimately lead to a sustainable health care system.

In his February 7, 2021 letter to the NLMA, Premier Furey recognized that changes are required to improve health outcomes for individuals and address our demographic challenges. He advised that patient access to family physicians and primary health care teams is of immediate concern to the Liberal Government. The Premier also acknowledged the ongoing challenges with recruitment and retention of physicians in the province and he committed to work with the NLMA to improve the retention of Memorial medical graduates.

Our hope is that by working together, we can achieve our shared goal of ensuring high quality, sustainable medical care for the people of the province. The NLMA will continue to update you on progress as negotiations get underway.

Sincerely,



Lynette Powell, MD
President



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