CMA president begs female MDs to become active in organized medicine

When the Federation of Medical Women of Canada (FMWC) held its annual meeting in Banff, Alta., in late August, then CMA President Victor Dirnfeld begged his female colleagues to become more involved in organized medicine. He said too few female physicians are currently involved, especially in leadership positions. "I'm here to plead with you to change that — to ask you to get involved for the good of us all."

The CMA says 27% of Canada's practising physicians are women, as are about 50% of medical students. Although their proportion within the profession is increasing steadily, there's still a significant shortage of women playing leadership roles. Dirnfeld said the CMA is working aggressively to change this and wants to work with the FMWC to achieve the goal. "Above all, I want members of this federation to rest assured that the CMA would not and will not contemplate in any way usurping or hijacking the federation's special role and unique function. . . . We look to draw on the pool of expertise, that incredible resource, that exists in your organization."

FMWC President Charmaine Roye said the organization is pleased that the CMA is trying to ensure that female physicians interested in developing leadership skills won't have to decide where their allegiance lies and choose between participating in the CMA or the FMWC. "This way they can both contribute to the CMA and

Dirnfeld: "get involved for the good of us all"

stay true to the policies of the federation," said Roye, an obstetrician-gynecologist from Brantford, Ont.

The CMA is already taking steps to increase involvement by women. At the moment, a committee dealing with issues facing female physicians is studying gender equality and leadership issues; it is chaired by Ottawa dermatologist Sue Swiggum, an FMWC past president. The CMA is also running leadership workshops and practice management seminars for medical women, in collaboration with its financial subsidiary, MD Management. As well, the CMA board recently named Dr. Cynthia Forbes, past president of the Medical Society of Nova Scotia, chair of its Council on Health Care and Promotion.

During the Banff meeting, FMWC members discussed whether the federation should continue to advocate on behalf of both women physicians and women's health. Roye said the focus, at least for now, is going to be on giving female physicians the skills they need to play a more active role in developing policies on women's health issues. — © *Barbara Kermode-Scott*

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Like the manned mission to Mars, speech-recognition machines that work seem to be one of those technological promises that is always just around the corner. Prototype programs have not proved popular because they worked only with discreet speech, which meant that the user had to pause between words. As well, vocabularies were limited, so no computer could handle multisyllabic monsters like pancreatoduodenectomy. And they were user dependent, meaning that the software could handle only the peculiar vocal intonations of a single user. Transcriptionists seemed to have guaranteed job security. However, newer and faster computers and the falling price of random access memory chips mean that today's computers are more powerful than ever, and speech-recognition software has taken full advantage of the boost in wattage. Today's software recognizes continuous speech at up to 160 words per minute, with 95% accuracy. Multiple users can be supported at a single station and specific medical vocabularies have been developed. If you want to learn more about this new tool, check out 2 commercial sites — **www.dragonsystems.com** and **www.solutions.ibm.com/healthcare/solution/msrad.html**. Of course, each site promotes its own product, but you will see the direction speech recognition is heading. It may still be a bit early to send your transcriptionist on a permanent vacation, but her days are definitely numbered. — *Dr. Robert Patterson*, **robpatterson@email.msn.com**