

CMA presidency becomes a hot commodity

The CMA appears to be bucking the national trend toward declining interest in election campaigns.

The latest sign is the 6 Ontario physicians seeking to become CMA president for 2004/05, the largest slate in the CMA's 135-year history. Although the vote's outcome was unknown at press time, the election was expected to attract a large number of voters because of unprecedented campaigning by the candidates — Drs. Elliot Halparin, Albert Schumacher, Kenneth Sky, John Tracey, Ronald Wexler and Michael Wyman.

Campaign tools have included advertisements in medical society newsletters, mass emails, at least 2 Web sites, and public endorsements by well-known physicians.

Dr. Marc Baltzan of Saskatoon says it's a far cry from when he and Regina surgeon Murray Fraser faced off for the right to become Saskatchewan's nominee for CMA president in 1982. "Murray was a great guy," he said, "and basically we just put our names in and left it at that. I happened to win."

In fact, "elections" that used to see the CMA president-elect named by provincial medical associations have now been placed largely in the hands of the members, who cast ballots by mail. The 12 associations comprising the CMA select the president in rotation, according to the size of their membership. Ontario doctors selected the CMA president for 1999 and 2004; when New Brunswick doctors selected Dr. Dana Hanson as president last year, it was their first choice since 1981.

Toronto surgeon Hugh Scully, who defeated 3 other candidates for the 1999 presidency, is surprised by the number running this time but says the competition is "very healthy." He also predicted that voter response this year will be much higher than for that election, when less than 20% of ballots were cast, because of the amount of campaigning that was done.

David Balmain, executive director of the New Brunswick Medical Society, said voter turnout wasn't a problem when Hanson was elected. He said 80% of eligible doctors voted and all 3 candi-



dates ran campaigns. "The physicians here took it very seriously."

Balmain expects that competition will continue to increase because communication technology, particularly email, has made campaigning more affordable.

John Laplume, executive director of the Manitoba Medical Association, said both candidates for CMA president in 2003/04 ran "very active" campaigns that included meetings with doctors across the province. Gimli FP Sunil Patel eventually won the race, defeating Winnipeg anesthetist Ian White; 53% of eligible members voted. Laplume said active campaigns are a good sign. "I'd much rather see it that way than the other."

Scully said there was only "limited campaigning" in his election, during which he attracted support from specific constituencies. "I was known by the university community and by the specialist community, and since I was the only specialist running, that had to help."

Baltzan remembers his time as president fondly because the then controversial Canada Health Act was being developed, and he had a chance to spar regularly with federal health minister Monique Bégin. "I was on TV all the time," he recalls, "and I was still getting calls 5 years after I left."

As for the current election in Ontario, Baltzan says "it's a good sign when people are fighting for the job. It tells you that they want to get something done." — *Patrick Sullivan, CMAJ*

Medical students discover the reality of weapons of mass destruction

April Kam says it's impossible to understand the suffering caused by nuclear war without seeing its aftermath.

"In high school they teach you that World War II happened and, PS, we dropped a bomb on Japan," says the final-year medical student at McMaster University.

Kam, 24, and 3 other Canadian medical students went to Japan in February to attend the Forum on the Abolition of Weapons of Mass Destruction, which was hosted by the Japanese affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. The forum featured discussions on nuclear disarmament and about peace on the Korean Peninsula, as well as visits to the Nagasaki and Hiroshima peace memorials. The students met Japanese medical students and physicians, as well as survivors of the WW II nuclear blasts that killed nearly 500 000 civilians.



Sean Barry, Erin Adams, Yasmine Hussain and April Kam in Japan

Organized by Ottawa-based Physicians for Global Survival (PGS), the tour involved students from McMaster and Dalhousie universities and the University of British Columbia. "Given the current international crisis surrounding ... weapons of mass destruction and the fact that there is little or no content on these issues in the medical curriculum, this is an extremely valuable learning opportunity for future doctors," says PGS Executive Director Debbie Grisdale. — *Jim Donnelly, CMAJ*