A chat with Cabinet Minister Dr. Kellie Leitch

She's an MD, an MP and has an MBA. Now 42-year-old pediatric orthopedic surgeon Dr. Kellie Leitch has another title, though it doesn't start with "M": Cabinet minister. In his recent Cabinet shuffle, Prime Minister Stephen Harper appointed Leitch, who was elected as the member of Parliament for Simcoe–Grey (Ontario) in 2011, to the positions of minister of labour and minister of status of women.

But Leitch has not left medicine behind entirely. She's maintaining her licence by volunteering at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in Ottawa.

In addition to medicine and politics, Leitch has a background in business education. Owner of a master's of business administration, completed during her medical residency, she once served as chair of the Ivey International Centre for Health Innovation at the Richard Ivey School of Business in London, Ontario.

CMAJ recently spoke by phone with Leitch about how she balances her clinical and parliamentary work.

CMAJ: How did you become interested in politics?

Leitch: In 2006, I was approached by the minister of finance to chair the panel on the children's fitness tax credit, a substantive piece of legislation and a significant investment of funds in Canadian families. More than 2.5 million families benefited, and it helped get kids out and active. We have an obesity challenge, and tackling that is something I'm really passionate about. It allowed me to see something very different than my work as a pediatric surgeon: the huge impact that good public policy can do.

CMAJ: Why is continuing to practise medicine important to you?

Leitch: It keeps me grounded. There is nothing more intimate than a parent's relationship with their children. I have the great privilege of being able to make

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Dr. Kellie Leitch, MP for Simcoe–Grey (Ontario), still practises medicine as a volunteer at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario.

sure that children who can't play on the playground — because their parents are beyond anxious about a trauma or injury or some challenge or disability they may have — can get back on the playground and play.

CMAJ: What is a day like when you do both clinical and government work?

Leitch: I do call, so what typically happens is that I do teaching rounds in the morning [several times a week] from seven, seven-thirty until eight-thirty, nine o'clock, and through the day I am covered by another surgeon, from nine until four or five o'clock. And then I do call in the evening. During typical workday hours, I'm on Parliament Hill or at my department or with constituents in my riding. Then, after hours, I'm on call, so I might find myself, at seven or eight o'clock at night, fixing a child's elbow or femur. Also, I do call for the majority of the day on Friday and all day Saturday and Sunday when I'm on call [one weekend every six or seven weekends].

CMAJ: How have your education and experiences in business benefited your career?

Leitch: The skills sets from my MBA and also from working at the business school have served me very, very well. I have an appreciation for a budget. I recognize how expenditures are made and how to forecast and things like that. I understand the human resources side. It taught me some very good strategic and tactical skills, something very different than you learn in medical school.

CMAJ: What will be your focus as minister of labour?

Leitch: The labour program in Canada is responsible for safe and fair workplaces. More than a third of Canadians are on jobsites every day. We need to make sure every Canadian is as productive as possible, to drive forward the economy, but they do that because they know, and we assure them, they are protected and in a safe and fair workplace.

CMAJ: What will be your focus as minister of status of women?

Leitch: One of the primary focuses regarding the status of women is dealing with the crisis of violence against women and girls ... but we are also concerned about economic security for women, making sure that women are financially secure in their own right so they can have productive lives.

CMAJ: What are your long-term goals for your political career?

Leitch: At the moment, I'm just delighted to have been asked to be a member of the Cabinet. I'm delighted with my new role. I have a lot to learn, so I'll stay focused on this for right now. — Roger Collier, *CMAJ*

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