

## A year of listening, focusing and action

**D**uring his year as president of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), Dr. Chris Simpson has done a lot of listening. He has listened to doctors and nurses, to union leaders and mayors, and, of course, to patients. Time and again, two topics came up: end-of-life care and seniors' care.

"These are critical issues of great concern to Canadians right now and the CMA has stepped up its game to show leadership and bring much needed discussion and clarity to the national debate on these topics," Simpson said in his valedictory address on Aug. 25 in Halifax at the CMA's General Council.

The topic of doctor-assisted death is particularly complex, noted Simpson, who mentioned the "profoundly moving stories" he has heard on both sides of the debate. "We learned about the sanctity of life, but also about the absurdity of denying death, and how embracing death as a part of life, when the time comes, can be liberating."

Despite the complexities, the medical profession "cannot go far wrong" if the guiding principle on this issue is a deep sense of respect for the beliefs and feelings of patients, said Simpson. "We will continue to meticulously protect the vulnerable and respect individual patients' autonomy, within the bounds of the law. We will not judge our patients and their families. We will support them by listening and respecting and advocating for them. As always, we will keep our patients and our families at the centre of everything we do."



CMA/Mark Holleron

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Simpson has spent much of his time as CMA president advocating for a national strategy to improve health care for seniors. At last year's meeting, when he assumed the role of president, he said that adapting to meet the changing needs of an aging population would benefit the entire health care system. Since then, he has learned that many others feel the same way.

"I climbed the steps to Parliament many times this year, but I also climbed the steps to community centres and city halls and seniors' residences across the country, and I'm telling you Canadians from coast to coast to coast need and want this desperately. They're hungry for it because they know it's a real issue."

Canada's federal political parties have started to "open their eyes to the urgency" of the issue, said Simpson, though they have been reluctant to make any promises. But the CMA, led by incoming president Dr. Cindy Forbes, has no intention of letting candidates off the hook, said Simpson.

"So far in this campaign, we have heard precious little in the way of commitments from our leaders as to how they will work to fix this situation. For me, that just means that our work doesn't end today. As we head into the heart of the election period, we'll continue to be out there in the public, front and centre." — Roger Collier, *CMAJ*

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