

HEART & SOUL

Physician shortage a personal issue for CMA's incoming president

How bad is Canada's physician shortage? Dr. Dana Hanson, who assumes the CMA presidency Aug. 21, has a pretty good idea.

Despite an extensive search, the Fredericton dermatologist hasn't been able to find a locum to help out in his practice during his year-long term. The issue is important, because he expects the presidency to consume 180 to 200 of his working days. The failure to find a replacement means Hanson has had to cut his practice hours and patient list, as well as the hours worked by his support staff. "It's extremely difficult for them," he says.

But workforce shortages will be just one of the issues Hanson pursues as president. During much of his term he will be preoccupied with the reports on medicare reform from Senator Michael Kirby and Roy Romanow, which are to be delivered this fall. Regardless of what they recommend, Hanson says the consultation process has helped the CMA build its own consensus on where medicare is headed. "We have made a giant step forward," he says.

Also high on Hanson's priority list are physician health and well-being and health promotion.

Hanson, who has served as deputy speaker and speaker at General Council since 1994, replaces Quebec gastroenterologist Henry Haddad as president.

A 1974 graduate, he will become the first Dalhousie University medical school alumnus to head the CMA.

Hanson's involvement with medical politics began in 1981, the year he established his solo practice in Fredericton. He served in a variety of posts with the New Brunswick Medical Society and was its president in 1992/93. He also received the Canadian Dermatology Association's highest award, the President's Cup, for his work in restructuring its board.

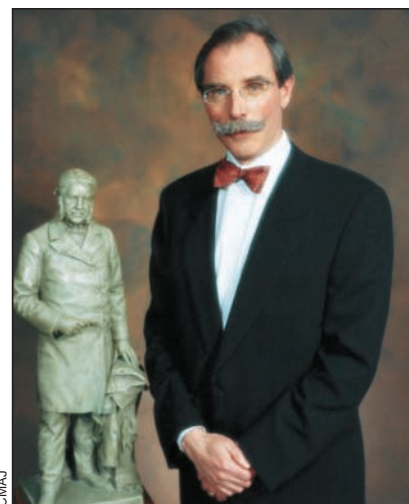
Hanson brings a "grassroots, in-the-trenches viewpoint" to the presidency. "In a small province, we feel many of the problems earlier [than other jurisdictions] and they're magnified because of both the economy of scale and our economy itself."

Hanson was 1 of only 2 dermatologists in New Brunswick when he moved to Fredericton, and although the number later swelled to 10, it has dropped back to 5. Workforce issues like this provide a natural lead-in to his second area of concern, physician health and well-being, because CMA surveys point to a medical profession that is overworked and heavily stressed (see *CMAJ* 1999;161[8]:1020-1).

Hanson is impassioned about the need for initiatives to help doctors cope with their increasingly hectic work environment. He says that substance abuse has been the traditional focus of physician-support programs, but thinks the focus should expand to include stress-related depression because of factors such as low morale and increased workload. "As a profession," says Hanson, "we haven't been as open and supportive as we need to be." He plans to assess the programs available in each province, coordinate an exchange of information, and then see if the CMA can develop national coordination of support systems.

His other main area of interest is health promotion, and specifically the CMA's new Office for Public Health. Hanson, who is concerned that the media often characterizes his profession as self-interested, is convinced that the CMA has to concentrate on providing information and resources to Canadians on issues such as smoking cessation and Aboriginal health. "I feel strongly that part of our professional responsibility is to give back to society — we have an obligation to do so."

Hanson takes this obligation per-



Hanson and Sir Charles Tupper: another physician leader from the East Coast

sonally as well. He raises money for the United Way and volunteers in the arts community, sitting on the Board of Directors for Fredericton's summer music festival and serving as chair of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery board. Hanson, a tenor, and his wife, Phyllis, are also regular performers in the local Gilbert and Sullivan Society; their last performance was in *The Mikado*.

Hanson's diverse interests have carried through to his 4 children. Tony, 29, works for the RCMP in British Columbia, while Julie, 28, is a government employee in Charlottetown. Natasha, 26, is completing a master's degree in anthropology at Carleton University in Ottawa, where Marc, 24, is finishing a BA in film studies.

Most of Hanson's extracurricular activities will be put on hold when he assumes the presidency, and Phyllis is taking a year's leave of absence from the federal Department of Citizenship and Immigration to provide "moral support."

No interviewer could resist asking Hanson about his trademark bow tie — Hanson says he's worn one for 25 years. "It's convenient," he explains with a smile. "It never falls in my soup." — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*