

Public health a top priority for new CMA president

Advocating for the restoration of federal funding and helping to ensure the new Ministry of Public Health is established are top priorities the CMA's new President, Dr. Albert Schumacher.

The 45-year-old family physician from Windsor, Ont. also wants to make sure the new position of Chief Medical Officer of Health is "unfettered" by political influence, and that a federal immunization program is set up.

Schumacher, who was President of the Ontario Medical Association (OMA) in 2001–02, also intends to advocate strongly on environmental issues. "It is critical that the CMA demonstrate leadership on international issues such as smog, air and water quality, and tobacco control, that will bring about both short- and long-term measurable impacts on the health and wellness of Canadians."

Schumacher, who becomes the CMA's 133rd president on Aug.

18 (*CMAJ* 2003;169[6]:594), first came into the public eye during Ontario's 1986 physician strike when he led protests that garnered national headlines.

Subsequent to the strike, "there was a great awakening among the medical profession as to the necessity of exerting credible influence on the political process," said Schumacher.

He became a council member of the OMA Board of Directors and was recruited into its new Public Affairs Committee. He also guided the development of the OMA Political Action Committee and government relations program.

In the face of rising tuition, Schumacher led the establishment of the Ontario Medical Student Bursary Fund so that "no qualified student would ever have to say 'I was accepted but could not afford to attend medical school in Ontario.'"

More recently, he sat on Ontario's Source Water Protection

Expert Advisory Group, set up in the wake of the Walkerton tragedy, and testified at the Walkerton inquiry.

At the CMA, Schumacher has been a council member since 1989, a member of the Political Action Committee (1992–1999) and a board member since 1998.

Advocacy, however, is only the means to an end — Schumacher says his foremost desire is to improve medicine. "We have been starved in resources . . . We've made some changes to become competitive with the rest of the world, but we've only just turned the corner."

Despite the demands of the year ahead, Schumacher intends to keep his solo practice going. He is married with 3 children. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*



Dr. Albert Schumacher

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MEDICAL LEGAL

Disciplinary action pending after ED patient turned away

The Quebec College of Physicians' disciplinary committee will soon hand down disciplinary action against Dr. Linda Cloutier, a Shawinigan-Sud general practitioner.

The committee found Cloutier guilty in late June of not coming to a patient's assistance in June 2002. The patient, Claude Dufresne, died after an ambulance was turned away from the hospital 300 metres from his home. Dufresne, 51, was pronounced dead at a hospital in Trois-Rivières, about 20 minutes away.

Faced with a doctor shortage, the Centre Hospitalier du Centre-de-la-Mauricie in Shawinigan-Sud had recently instituted a policy of closing its ED after 9 p.m. for walk-in cases and midnight for ambulances, until 8 a.m. the following morning.

An internal branch of the College lodged the complaint against Cloutier. The agreed statement of facts between the 2 parties noted that the ambulance services had been previously advised that, without exception, no ambulance should be directed to the hospital between 11:59 p.m. and 8 a.m.

At 12:07 a.m. on June 20, the ED received a call asking whether an ambulance carrying a cardiac arrest patient could be brought there. Given the hospital's policy, Cloutier indicated the ED was closed.

The statement also noted that Cloutier had the necessary skill for Advanced Cardiac Life Support and was aware that refusing to admit Dufresne would result in an additional delay of about 20 minutes.

Cloutier pleaded not guilty

to the complaint. Her lawyer declined comment about the case. A lawsuit launched by the Dufresne family against Cloutier and the hospital has not yet gone to court.

Yan Dufresne, 27, told the *CMAJ* how he and his father had previously discussed the impending closure of the hospital's ED. "We said what will happen if a pregnant woman arrives at the hospital and the ED is closed. We never thought of a case like my father's." Doctors must always be conscious that they have a duty to fulfill, he added.

Following the controversy surrounding Dufresne's death, the Quebec government implemented legislation to ensure that EDs remain open around the clock. — *Brenda Branswell, CMAJ*

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