

March 30, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to you today to offer my thanks to you all for the incredible effort you are making in the face of COVID-19. You may be working at a senior level on the pandemic response, or on the front-line providing care to patients who are understandably stressed and concerned about the well-being of their families. The compassion and expertise you are showing every day likely goes without thanks, but we all know you are putting yourself at risk for your patients as every day of this situation passes. It is impressive work, and you are to be congratulated for the professionalism you are showing during these unprecedented times.

This pandemic brings with it many questions and concerns for Manitoba physicians. I mention a few below and you can learn more at our new member resource site at www.DoctorsManitoba.ca/covid/. Further, you can contact Doctors Manitoba staff with your COVID-related questions or issues at covid19@doctorsmanitoba.ca.

Doctors Manitoba worked hard with government to get [virtual care tariffs](#) approved for you and your patients. Many of you have written to give gratitude and to describe how transformative this has been for you and the patients you serve. We continue to work on expansion of these tariffs to enable even better and safe patient care, and we commit to keep you updated as these negotiations continue.

Many of you have inquired about how the government can support those physicians whose practices have been disrupted by the pandemic. I want to assure you we have been in discussions with senior officials in the government on the matter for weeks now, and these talks continue. I must be transparent with you about the fact these negotiations will be an incredible challenge, and therefore I would not want to create the impression relief will come tomorrow. This will take time to get it right, and we are committed to work each day to impress upon the government how such a program will enable continuity of medical services and will be good for the economy. We will keep you apprised of developments in this regard, and in the meantime we have prepared [a summary of government economic assistance for businesses](#) that may help in some situations.

We have had many queries about the safety and security of our members, with particular regard to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). We encourage all our members to ensure they are safe and protected during this risky time, and to apprise yourselves of [the clinical guidelines around use of PPE](#). Some members have asked about the legalities and the implications of exercising the right to refuse work in unsafe circumstances, most predictably in those cases where appropriate PPE is not available. This is an extremely complicated issue, particularly as our obligations from the College of Physicians and Surgeons are concerned. We are working with them and our employers to provide some clear guidance on the right to refuse work in the coming days. In the interim, please make use of the professionals at Occupational Health if you are in need of further information about protection for the specific kind of work that you do. Keep yourself safe: we are all counting on you.

Some of you may be contacted by your local media to comment on various aspects of the pandemic or on the response by government. We are here to help. We strongly encourage you to refer all media calls to us at kjohnson@doctorsmanitoba.ca and we can provide a clear, concise response on your behalf. Information and clinical recommendations are shifting daily, and we make it our business to stay abreast of the changes. Further, we are engaged in delicate negotiations with government on several matters of import, and I cannot stress enough the importance of speaking with one voice.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the staff at Doctors Manitoba, who have been working long hours and weekends to negotiate and advocate for you and communicate with you during this unsettling time. Our CEO, Theresa Oswald, has been leading our seasoned veterans, and building a new, dynamic team of professionals who bring talents and skills to our organization which will help us thrive and grow. We owe all of these folks our thanks, because I know they have taken “having our backs” to a whole new level. Please join me in offering a virtual and socially distant standing ovation to our Doctors Manitoba team.

Please watch for more President’s Messages in our daily COVID-19 email updates. I promise to keep you informed of the work we are doing on your behalf to keep you safe and well during this challenging period of COVID-19.

Respectfully submitted,

Fourie Smith

Dr. L. Fourie Smith