

NATIONAL POST

Private care pioneer in line to head CMA: B.C.'s pick for doctors' post says medicare needs fixing

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One of the country's most outspoken proponents of private health care is a step away from heading the Canadian Medical Association after a surprise vote by his colleagues that has stunned many defenders of public medicare.

By tradition, the next president of the powerful doctors' group is supposed to be drawn from British Columbia, and Brian Day, owner of a pioneering private surgery clinic, was elected this week as the province's nominee.

His selection by B.C. physicians must be confirmed at a conference in August. Endorsement of the province's choice is usually a foregone conclusion, though challengers could come forward in the interim. One critic expressed concern yesterday that Dr. Day's views are "contrary to those of the general public."

Dr. Ruth Collins-Nakai, the association's current president, was not as blunt, calling the election "a striking choice."

"It sounds as if people are very frustrated about their ability to provide timely access to quality medical care."

Dr. Day, founder of the Cambie Surgery Centre in Vancouver, said yesterday he is not a one-issue candidate who sees private health care as some kind of cure-all. But he said that, as president, he would press to win a bigger role for the private sector to help fix a system he considers to be profoundly ill.

"The private sector should be allowed to compete with the public sector for medical services, doing surgeries," he said.

IMAGES



Ian Lindsay, CanWest
News Service

Dr. Brian Day's nomination as head of the Canadian Medical Association has to be confirmed by delegates to the national group's annual convention this August. Day is a director of an organization that represents and promotes independent clinics.

"Looking at European models, looking at Australia are worthwhile things to do. We have a unique opportunity to actually build the best system in the world, because we can learn from the mistakes that have been made and copy the good things."

Dr. Day is also the director of the Canadian Independent Medical Clinics Association, a Vancouver-based organization that represents and promotes independent clinics. The doctor is a controversial pioneer of private health care in Canada, having opened his Cambie centre in 1996. It was the first such medical facility to operate outside of the public system.

While the CMA has only edged in the direction of endorsing private health care in the past year, Dr. Day would represent a clear ideological shift as president. He is also an outsider to the organization, having never served as provincial president or within the national association.

In an election among his province's doctors, he defeated five current and former presidents of the B.C. Medical Association, triumphing on the last of five ballots 1,393-1,226 over Dr. Jack Burak, a family physician.

The selection has to be confirmed by delegates to the national group's annual convention in Charlottetown this August. Other candidates can be put forward up to 90 days before the meeting by nomination of at least 50 members. Or delegates can nominate candidates on the convention floor.

In most cases, the provincial nominee is confirmed, but other candidates were elected at the national conventions in 2003 and 1979.

The new president would not actually take office until August, 2007, and Dr. Collins-Nakai stressed that anyone in the post must reflect the views of the membership, not just their own beliefs.

But the prospect of Dr. Day in the post was alarming some observers yesterday.

"It is extremely disappointing that the provincial organization and, if they hold to tradition, the federal organization, would choose somebody whose values and views run so contrary to those of the general public," said Dr. Gordon Guyatt, head of the Ontario-based Medical Reform Group, strong backers of the one-tier public medicare system.

"It puts the profession at odds with the public."

He said Dr. Day's views could hold sway in the organization because delegates to last summer's convention passed somewhat contradictory resolutions on the public versus private debate, allowing the leader to veer one way or the other.

Harvey Voogd, co-ordinator of the Alberta group Friends of Medicare, said he is not sure whether even physicians are ready for Dr. Day to "rock the boat violently." Doing so

could alienate patients, who have come to see physicians as part of a universal, public system, he said.

"If that's the direction they want to go, there will be a very loud message sent to Canadians," he said.

Dr. Day's private, free-standing clinic provides orthopedic, eye and other surgery.

Illustration:

- Black & White Photo: Ian Lindsay, CanWest News Service / Dr. Brian Day's nomination as head of the Canadian Medical Association has to be confirmed by delegates to the national group's annual convention this August. Day is a director of an organization that represents and promotes independent clinics.