President’s Message: a time for change

On October 11, 2017, more than 200 practitioners attended the first Annual Members’ Meeting and an additional 1,400 viewed the meeting online.

I truly appreciate everyone who made the effort to engage with us during our first Annual Members’ Meeting. We had 226 participants in the Pigeonhole platform who asked 235 questions. While we got to some of the questions live, the administrative staff are already working on putting together the reports so that we can get you answers to the rest of them in upcoming issues of the Pulse.

For those of you who were not able to participate in the day, I want to share with you the elements of my president’s address. A short video was played during the presentation you can watch it here.

As all of Council will confirm, every time I open a new session of Council I always start with, “Seven generations from now, what will they say about the decisions we’ve made?”

Your Council strives to set a vision for the profession that applies to all 9,300+ regulated paramedicine practitioners in the province of Alberta. We act as agents for the entire profession and work as paramedics for paramedics.

But my questions last week were about how our profession is currently viewed. Are we valued? Are we respected? Do you sincerely believe that society respects what we do?

In 2012 the Alberta government announced that EMS was to be recognized solely as health care, removing us a public safety agents. In 2015 we were not part of the mental health review. And there are no paramedics at the table talking about the current fentanyl crisis.

When we consider our relationship with physicians, I’m curious, why does there seem to be a move to limit clinical practice, instead of work together to ensure we strive toward practice excellence?

But, maybe we shouldn’t always look to others and their view of us until we look in the mirror. Letters and dialog that criticize, make false accusations or generally denigrate another practitioner, whether it’s to the government, an RN, a patient or a family member, does nothing to help legitimize our profession.

In the meeting I read from two letters that were sent to the Alberta Health Minister that highlighted how we undermine ourselves.

Now I am not suggesting that you shouldn’t be upset when you see something that you don’t agree with. But when we choose to go to the media or the government before we seek each other out to talk it through, and gain an understanding of the other perspective, we risk undermining how people view us.

Our own actions simply cannot be the reason our profession doesn’t advance.

We co-create our history together, all of us. When a practitioner is in the media talking about EMS, when I treat a patient, when our representatives speak in the legislature - all of those individual acts create our shared history.
You can begin to see that what every practitioner says matters. How I treat my patients matters. And what’s said and done is done and whatever has happened has now become a part of our shared history.

Understanding this concept of shared history is a part of understanding self-regulation. Remember that legislation doesn’t make us professional – we make ourselves professional.

If you identify as being a paramedic then you own what another paramedic does – how you respond to that act defines you, and us, as professionals.

So, what should we do differently? How can we come together as a community to change the conversation and ultimately the perception of this profession because when NASA and the RSA and the ESA, etc. all come together and start to plan, I want us there. That’s my vision. And, not as an afterthought, but because society sees our value and respects our position.

Since becoming President I, with Council and Administration have taken a number of steps toward realizing our vision of being a respected and valued part of society. I outline some achievements in the speech. Moving forward, we will focus regulatory work with the value of practice excellence. We will continue to strive to find ways to support the profession – the entire profession - in this work and in the pursuit of practice excellence.

So, seven generations from now, what will paramedics think of the decisions we have made?

We need to come together as community, and realize our potential. We need to change our conversation and by doing so change our culture to create an opportunity for us to come together as a community. A united community of educators, researchers, managers, PCP’s, ACP’s, EMR’s, with a united vision of providing Albertans . . . or Martians ... with the best out-of-hospital or pre-hospital care.

Live long and Prosper

I encourage you to reach out to me at president-council@collegeofparamedics.org if you have any questions or comments.

ps - if you want you can watch the speech from the AMM here.

In service,

Pete Helfrich, President
Alberta College of Paramedics
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