



STATEMENT TO THE ROYAL GAZETTE 28 June 2019

On Wednesday 26 June 2019 the Bermuda Medical Doctors' Association hosted a meeting with 40 plus physicians, mostly from primary care, for a discussion with the Ministry of Health about health financing and the standard health benefit. Although all physicians are understandably concerned that any changes may affect their workload and/or pay, what needs to be understood is that we all have the intention to provide the best quality care to everyone who needs it. With the current system, many of the Bermuda community are not able to access this care.

Currently basic health insurance only pays for urgent care at the hospital when people have developed sometimes irreversible medical problems. Ideally, all of Bermuda's community should have access to see their doctor and other health providers regularly to receive care aimed to prevent chronic health problems.

Bermuda's physicians absolutely support improving access to essential health care services. However, there are significant costs to providing quality care that must be acknowledged. The physician community would not be able to absorb reduced reimbursement with increasing workload. Much work is already done by community physicians without charges, pro-bono or at significantly reduced fees.

In the current system, health care dollars in Bermuda go mostly to treating acute conditions. Preventative care such as high blood pressure screening and management, education to assist in management and even reversal of diabetes, and early diagnosis of many other condition, including chronic kidney disease, cancer and heart disease, are not covered by the basic health insurance package. This means that those with the least resources have to pay out of pocket for these essential services. It also happens that these groups are usually at highest risk for chronic diseases and therefore need more care. Even those who have supplemental major medical health insurance are often left with substantial co-payments under the current reimbursement schemes. Our local health insurers pay significantly more to providers overseas for the same services than they reimburse to local physicians. The goal of any changes is not about physician pay, but it is about finding a way to reduce out of pocket costs for essential health care locally.

The meeting on Wednesday was an opportunity for physicians to start being more involved in developing the solutions that are needed to achieve more equity in the Bermuda health care system. A lot more consultation is needed before any decisions are made about the way forward.

We, the Executive of the Bermuda Medical Doctors' Association, are facilitating deeper consultation between the physicians and the Ministry of Health. Most of those present at the meeting offered their expertise to help develop ideas and greater understanding between the Government and our colleagues.

The un-named physicians who have contacted the Royal Gazette about potential changes to health care reimbursement before the meeting were uninformed and some of what has been reported is incorrect. There has been no discussion about strike action from the BMDA. The BMDA will be coordinating task groups to assist the Health Council and the Ministry of Health in constructive dialogue. The physician community must be intimately involved from the start in creating solutions that will benefit all of Bermuda.

BMDA Executive - President: Dr Annabel Fountain, Treasurer: Dr Benjamin Lau, Secretary: Dr JoAnn Cousins-Simpson, Members at Large: Dr Michael Czerwinski, Dr Sophie Mathew, Dr Annie Pinto