**Rallying behind physician recruitment**

**TRACY BELL**

**COMMENTARY**

We all know how important it is to bring more doctors to the province and to our region. Competent, caring, and committed health professionals are the literal heart of a strong health care system. And, right now, clearly, we’re in crisis.

So how can the business community help? A good place to start is by encouraging those new physicians who train here, and are from here, to stay here. To set up shop - not just as a medical practitioner within the Regional Health Networks, but also as a small business owner, and as part of a supportive business community.

Just as the latest graduates from Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick finish up their schooling, the Saint John Region Chamber is hosting an event to show them how much we’d love them to stay, and to support them in establishing their business.

It’s a symposium called the Current State of Health Care and Looking Ahead, and a key component will be encouraging the Dal Med grad class to choose our region.

The Chamber has a mandate to pursue innovation and a big, bold vision to make this area the best place in Canada to start and grow a business.

If we’re going to achieve that vision, then part of what we need to be looking at is not only that we are attracting and supporting entrepreneurs and business owners, we need to ensure our communities and populations have reliable and timely access to quality services - and health care tops the list.

Access to a primary care physician, shorter wait times at clinics and hospitals, and better/faster access to medical procedures, are reasonable service requests that enhance a community’s long-term reputation as a desirable place in which to live and raise a family, also as a smart place to establish and scale companies of value.

Conversely, when those things fall off and fall away, it has a very real impact, not just on the literal health of our families and communities, but also on the emotional wellbeing and productivity of our workforce. And without-a-doubt it dampens our appeal to the very people we want to attract.

It’s a beautiful thing to see our population growing in this province - more in the past three years that in the previous 30 years combined said BMO chief economist Doug Porter to a group of business leaders in Saint John this week - but with more people comes a very real need for meaningful work and investments in services and infrastructure both. And business, I believe, needs to be helping lead the way alongside policy makers, clinicians and patients in terms of coming up with ideas and implementing solutions to solve the crisis, and make sure new people want to keep coming here.

Let’s start, as a business community, by helping these emerging medical professionals set up shop.

Physicians in New Brunswick are also by-enlarge business owners with a practice to operate, systems to establish, and staff to manage. However, ‘establishing and running a business’ isn’t the focus of medical school, and so many young professionals emerging from the education system and transitioning into enterprise - while expertly trained in the areas in which they will serve and benefit their patients - seriously struggle when it comes to the ‘business part’ of their practice.

An entrepreneurial collective prepared to go the distance to help new doctors get established and succeed - by making it easy for them to understand the steps in setting up their business practice, and accessing the right kind of financial and legal resources for example - should have an advantage when it comes to recruiting and retaining new physicians.

That's why on April 17, the Chamber is hosting the half-day health care symposium at the Delta in Saint John. It's a chance for our region to come together as one and rally behind the newest cohort of graduating physicians we hope will make the decision to set up shop in the Saint John region.

More than giving the almost-minted new docs a chance to meet and learn from relevant and allied business leaders, ready to lend a hand, this event will be a chance for the business community to get a deeper look into what is happening in health care.

Bruce Fitch, New Brunswick's Minister of Health, will provide an update on the current state of health care and the government's plans.

Economist David Campbell, President of Jupia Consultants Inc., will share his research on health care in New Brunswick, including the business of health care, emerging gaps and opportunities, and recommendations.

Also, a panel featuring clinicians and key physician recruitment stakeholders will bring additional insights, expertise and perspective to the discussion. The focus is going to be future-forward.

I’ve seen firsthand the impact that health and wellness entrepreneurship can have in our community. I came to my new role with the Chamber this week after seven years as co-founder and CEO of Millennia TEA. Our mission was to help people Live. Better. Longer. To that end, we created a patented process and had a global innovation that maximized the natural health properties of the mighty tea plant. Using business to help people have “More Good Time” is what motivates me personally and professionally.

Certainly, entrepreneurship is important to me. It’s a key reason why I am really and sincerely excited to get the chance to serve the business community in this role.

If you are a business owner, entrepreneur, health care professional or human being with an interest in the future of health care here, I hope you will join us April 17 as we welcome Atlantic Canada's newest cohort of physicians. (Details can be found on our website at [business.thechambersj.com/events/](http://business.thechambersj.com/events/))

I’ll leave you with this thought.

I believe the oldest and most inexpensive form of sales and marketing is still the most effective: Word of Mouth. It’s not a quick win necessarily, but it’s the sure-fire way to build reputation over time. Let’s demonstrate to these new doctors what a supportive and world-class business community looks like, and start to build the momentum that will establish our region as a place where talented professionals in health can build practices that thrive and solve substantial problems.

In doing so, not only will we help address the current health care crisis, but we’ll also be taking steps toward creating the kind of region that starts to look really appealing for business owners in lots of different industries, and skilled labour, and families from outside the region and from outside the country.

It’s early days for me in this new role. But even now, on week one, I can see clearly the desire there is in our region from business leadership to collectively and collaboratively ‘level up.’ To lean into our strengths and live into this feeling we share that there is something really special here. Our people. Our place in the world. Our connection to each other. And a desire to tap into the potential that exists to create something special and do a lot of good.

I’m excited to get started.

*Tracy Bell is Chief Executive Officer of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce. Her column appears monthly.*