Second Opinion

Eliminating health care arrogance
AS IMPORTANT AS BUILDING MEDICAL SCHOOL

It's the worst kept secret on the Island. UPEI President Alaa Abd-El-Aziz wants to build a medical school, which could provide the province a much needed local source of doctors, and deliver the type of professional gravitas needed to attract research dollars to the province.

So far it's nothing more than inside chatter among the university, health care and political class. But it does seem to have credible momentum, despite what would be significant upfront and ongoing operational costs. Speculation is that a UPEI medical school would partner with an already established school, such as Memorial in Newfoundland or Northern Ontario School of Medicine, the two leaders in rural focused medical training in the country.

The school idea isn't new. It was first proposed by former Island NDP leader Herb Dickieson, who tried unsuccessfully to build the needed coalition. But perceptions change and a school is now seen as one piece toward improving PEI as a work destination for health care providers. But if we don't deal with other issues, like the 'toxic' work environment described by many departing Health PEI employees, a medical school investment will likely be a waste of time and money.

The toxic environment is a byproduct of a top down approach, driven by political interference and an unwieldy bureaucracy disparate in focus and priorities, and prone to promotion of pet projects like the mental health research centre that will do nothing to improve frontline services in the province.

An issue that is equally tough to fix is the PEI College of Physicians and Surgeons, a self-regulating body for Island MDs that is too often an impediment to problem solving.

Self-regulating bodies have the power to make up, and enforce, their own rules for entry. The college has historically been unnecessarily slow to accept foreign medical school credentials. Part of the issue is college self-importance. Part is fear of shrinking the lobby power of doctors by eliminating the chronic shortage (Negotiating power is always stronger when demand outstrips supply). And part is no doubt driven by public interest.

Paul MacNeill

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But someone needs to oversee the college, which has authority to investigate and deliver penalties to its members.

One recent decision involved a Montague GP. For the record my doctor, who I have always found to be courteous, professional and competent. I won't detail the allegations, which the doctor self reported to the college and were the focus of numerous news stories. The punishment, for the most part, seemed reasonable. Save one. A demand that if the doctor returns to practice she: "Shall live outside the community where she practices ..."

Shall is a powerful word in the law. It compels an action.

The problem with telling anyone where they can live is it runs smack dab into the Constitution of Canada and specifically mobility rights enshrined under Section 6.

I asked the college for a legal opinion to support its residence demand. The college was indignant, ridiculously saying it is a suggestion on where the doctor can practice, not where they must live.

Words matter. This is clearly not what the college ruling states.

Once again I asked for a legal opinion in support of its position. Once again crickets from the PEI College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Now to be fair, George Carruthers is new to the college and was only recently named registrar after serving a high-risk Charlottetown population with distinction for years. The issue is not with Carruthers but the institutional bias within the college that suggests its decision making is beyond reproach.

Look at this decision - and this specific demand - through the lens of a doctor who may be interested in moving to PEI. It can easily be viewed as unnecessarily heavy-handed and over the top. And quite possibly contrary to the Constitution of Canada. It could be an impediment to successful recruitment.

If our province wants to build a sustainable health system that recruits and retains health professionals, including doctors, we need more than a medical school. We need to strip away self-important silos found in the health care bureaucracy and College of Physicians and Surgeons because they are not always focused on the greater good.

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Our SPACE

Eastern Graphic Staff

Standing tall in determination

Marcella Demeulenaere - saying her name brings a smile to my face although the circumstance for writing this small tribute is doleful.

A number of years back Marcella worked here at The Graphic, both in circulation and routinely cleaning our often less-than-tidy workspaces.

Marcella passed away last week.

However, memories of her character will certainly live on among those who had the pleasure of knowing her.

Heather Moore

As serious as Marcella was about a task at hand she had an enviable sense of humour. Her witty remarks were often offered with a sombre expression that would quickly break into a smirk only to be followed by a guarded laugh.

Marcella's family eloquently shared her passion for collecting collectables in her memoriam on the Ferguson Logan Montague Funeral Home website.

But to add a tidbit from back in March 2016: The Graphic did a story on one of Marcella's missions, and she seemed to always have a challenge or two tucked away in her pocket for a rainy day.

Marcella's goal at this particular time was to collect a 10-piece set of Jamie Oliver knives made available through a Sobeys' promotion.

As a shopper for one person the Montague resident was self-tasked with collecting the required number of stamps to obtain the set, not just one or two knives but all 10 pieces, plus the block to store them in.

In true Marcella fashion she wasn't swayed and became so adroit at collecting the stamps she ended up sharing many extras with friends.

That is pretty much how Marcella went about her days - embracing aspirations and creating ways to achieve them.

An add-on about the knife set which she was eager to show off, was she had no intention to use the utensils. In fact they were safely stored away.

"They're sharp, very sharp," she said at the time.

Mission accomplished.

That seemed to be why this 81-year-old, heavily influenced by her Belgium roots, stood tall in determination and adeptness.

Heather Moore

Josh Lewis

When political hate goes too far

When you see a Justin Trudeau campaign stop cancelled because of fears for his safety, you start to wonder if the polarization of Canadian politics has hit a new low.

The unruly crowd of protesters in Bolton, Ontario went beyond mere political differences. They were screaming obscenities, many proudly displaying their middle fingers in the presence of kids.

Look, I'm no Trudeau fan. He's one of the weakest prime ministers in recent memory. He's addicted to ethics scandals and too arrogant to see that his party would be better off with a different leader, like Chrystia Freeland. Achieving a majority government should have been a cakewalk in 2019 against quite possibly the worst field of opposition choices of the 21st century.

But this is too much. This kind of rage is not healthy for anyone. There is plenty to criticize this prime minister about, but for some he seems to be the symbol of all evil in the world.

It's hard not to notice the division that has occurred the last five years or so, following the lead of the United States, as some Canadians moved closer and closer to the far-right vortex of leaders like Donald Trump.

An election is supposed to be about a free exchange of ideas and voters making up their mind based on platforms, leaders or their local candidates.

But partisanship seems to be growing ever stronger, leaving people on opposite sides of the spectrum with less common ground than ever.

Josh Lewis