Dr. Laurent Marcoux

Inaugural Address

Dr. Laurent Marcoux
President
Canadian Medical Association
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Dear colleagues. Dear friends. Good afternoon.

It’s with immense joy, honour and pride that I address you as CMA president this afternoon. It’s such a privilege to be representing the medical profession in this time of great change and transformation.

I share this joy, honour and pride with all of you — my colleagues — and also with my family, who are here today. In particular, my partner Marc-André who has been at my side these last few years, giving me the support I need both to conceive of my dreams and to achieve them.

My three sons give me motivation, hope and a reason to live every day. They’re without a doubt the greatest gift in my life, along with the four wonderful grandchildren they’ve given me. Étienne, the oldest, and Jean-Philippe, the youngest, are here with me today. Alexandre is always with me in spirit and in my heart. To all three of you, thank you for being my source of strength and hope.

I’m also here today because of my parents and my siblings, who’ve shown me so many examples of courage, of resilience in times of hardship, of determination to succeed and of confidence in the face of adversity. I’m the 11th of 13 children. My parents were without a doubt very brave to have such a big family! This in itself is an example of the dedication and commitment that has shaped me and that continues to motivate me today as a physician. My 12 brothers and sisters are strong and resilient, and they are models of perseverance for me. Not to mention my nearly 60 nieces and nephews who are also an immense source of inspiration. Each and every one of them are living examples of what our future will look like, and that thought keeps me grounded. Thank you all for so generously being here with me today, and in the years to come.

Being president of the Canadian Medical Association comes with enormous responsibility: walking in the footsteps of the great presidents who came before and who have led this wonderful organization.

Because our General Council is being held here in Quebec City this year, I think it’s especially important to honour Dr. Charles Tupper and his 163 colleagues who came together in this very city 150 years ago. They founded a medical association that is not only still active today, but is at the leading edge of the profession. I would like to recognize the CMA presidents who are here with us today, and thank them for carrying the torch and keeping the flame of our association burning bright.

I would also like to welcome the nine international delegations here today that have come to join us in celebrating our 150th anniversary.

The CMA’s 150th year of helping Canadians is also the 150th anniversary of our country! We’re as old as the country we serve and have been driving towards our vision — a “vibrant profession and a healthy population” — from our very beginning. As our country grew in an
often hostile environment, our brave pioneering ancestors needed the support of physicians to stay in good health and to accompany them in the harshest conditions and most inhospitable places. Physicians gave hope to our pioneers and helped them stay safe. This is still the case today, and always will be.

Our anniversary is also an occasion to remember the many feats and successes that mark our history. Let’s take a moment to remember the discovery of insulin by Dr. Frederick Banting and Dr. Charles Best in 1921. Remember Dr. Norman Bethune, who tended to the wounded on the battlefields of World War I and the Spanish Civil War. And remember the tireless devotion of Dr. Lucille Teasdale-Corti, who gave her life to help the poorest of the poor in Africa.

And we have many feats and successes to celebrate today. Across the country, we have physicians like Dr. Gilles Julien, working for the least fortunate, and Dr. Denis Vincent of Edmonton, creating innovative applications to improve access to care. Each and every one of you are successes in your own right, because of your commitment to caring for your patients every day, regardless of their background, culture or religion. We must continue to be a beacon of compassion for our patients and all humankind, for as Dr. Teasdale liked to remind us, “medicine is not just a profession, it is a vocation.”

As we celebrate this important milestone for the CMA, it would be easy to look to the past with nostalgia, but I think we should take this opportunity to consider the place of medical professionalism in our changing world. Despite the challenges we’re facing, and the need to adapt the way we practice, our professionalism will always be defined as total commitment to our patients. As professionals involved in all aspects of society and health, we must continue to hold our expertise to the highest standards in order to offer the best quality care.

We show our professionalism when we advocate for the patients we see every day. We’re better positioned than anyone to understand their needs and the most appropriate ways to meet their expectations. This requires us to be innovative; it’s up to us to be the architects of a well-organized health care system. Physicians today, like the physicians of tomorrow, must get involved in the political arena to protect the interests and well-being of their patients. The 21st-century physician must get out of their office and unite with other health care workers. More than ever before, they must make their voices heard to elected officials and decision-makers on behalf of the public and their profession in order to ensure health equity for all their patients.

We will achieve equity by addressing the social determinants of health we all know so well:

- Access to education
- A healthy environment
- Self-sufficiency
- Self-determination

We underestimate the healing power of these social determinants. If we give someone access to education, and a healthy environment to live in, we also give them a sense of pride and
fulfillment. Pride gives a person back their dignity and helps them stay in good health. It gives them back the power to act.

It is our patients who give us the energy to serve, and if we take this energy as inspiration, it will guide us through the most difficult times. We must use the gratification we receive from our day-to-day work to give our patients hope and confidence. Pride must be reflected in the story of our profession and in the story of each person we see. May ours be a story of pride, and of the joy of serving others.

The next 150 years hold so much promise for our profession. Technology is opening up new frontiers in medicine. Advances that were unimaginable a few years ago are now within reach. New modes of communication allow each and every one of us to act and advocate on behalf of our patients. We’re entering a new era where, more than ever, our patients are and will continue to be—active participants in the prevention, examination and treatment of their illnesses. As our practices undergo this sweeping change, the CMA will continue to be a partner to patients and physicians—a driving force for collaboration and a positive source of inspiration.

When we look to the future with clarity and courage, we see the youngest members of our profession. Whether you’re students, residents or newly practicing physicians, you carry the future of our profession on your shoulders. You share your commitment and your passion on social media. You’re concerned about the government’s intentions to further legislate your practice, and I can tell that you’re ready to respond. You’re determined to do what it takes to restore the prestige of our profession. Bravo. We’re counting on you to innovate and to continue to emphasize the human side of our profession. It’s a bold agenda, but I’m convinced that if we work together, we’ll find the courage to achieve our goals.

When I’m dealing with something personally difficult, I often find motivation by reminding myself that “it is not because things are difficult that we do not dare, it is because we do not dare that they are difficult.” I’m confident that, as professionals, we’ll never give up in the face of the greatest challenges. That’s the commitment we’ve made, because our patients are worth it, and they’re counting on us.

As I prepare to take on my new role as president of the CMA, my priorities are those of the organization. Your presence here this evening shows me that you share these priorities as well. Medical professionalism is incredibly important to me. Together, we must set a new strategic plan in motion that’s based on the all-important relationship between physicians and their patients.

As many of you know, I was the director of professional services for the Cree Nation in northern Quebec. When I was inducted as president of the Québec Medical Association a few years ago, a drumming ensemble came from the village of Chisasibi in honour and recognition of the occasion. The musicians presented me with an offering— the ribbons that were attached to their drums which I’m wearing today close to my heart! The sound of these drums has great significance for the Cree. They’re sacred instruments, and the music they make is
representative of the rhythm of the nation. The musicians told me that the spirit of the music was in these ribbons, and that this music would be with me for the rest of my life. Their spirituality has led me to believe that we have an opportunity to achieve true reconciliation with the First Nations. And as physicians, we must be part of this movement with First Nations and the founding peoples of Canada.

Thank you for your support and your confidence. What a privilege it will be to work alongside you throughout the coming year!

In closing, I would like to invite the Cree Nation to share the powerful music of their sacred drums.

Our profession has brought us together, and now it’s time for us to take action!