

In her new role as OMA president, Georgetown family doctor is voice for change

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Senior patients looking after their spouses who are bed-bound.

Patients who desperately need mental health support and are unable to get in to see specialists.

Patients who are going blind and can't get into the operating room for cataract surgery.

These are some examples of the current failings of Ontario's health-care system that Dr. Nadia Alam witnesses on a regular basis. And as Ontario Medical Association's new president, Alam says those are the types of issues that will begin to be addressed this year.

The OMA is still undergoing a policy negotiation and arbitration process with the provincial government, but after a year of looking inward, the OMA, under Alam's leadership, is focusing on heading health-system change, both in terms of primary care and home care.

However, Alam notes, this is not a job that the OMA can do on its own.

"Health-system change has to include more than just the OMA," she said.

"The OMA is a heavy hitter, but we also need the (nurse representatives and front-line workers), as well as the government."

Though she had a year to prepare for her new role, Alam said she felt the emotional magnitude when beginning the position on April 30.

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"I am very aware of the responsibility I now carry to speak truthfully and speak compassionately," Dr. Nadia Alam said, of her new role as OMA president.

compassionately," Alam said. "I'm also aware of being a female president at the OMA and the fact that in this #MeToo climate, what female physician leadership can look like to those who can follow, to the younger generation of female physicians who might want to step up and who I'm hoping will step up."

Last year, the OMA conduct-

ed an operational review of its organization, its roles and how well it serves its roles. Now, it is focusing on implementing the changes and recommendations that were a product of the review.

In terms of primary care, Alam says the OMA will be focusing on what patients expect, what patients need and what the

OMA can deliver in that regard.

The organization will also be concentrating on improving home care, a focus that the government began to move toward with its Patients First Act, but one that requires much fine tuning, Alam said.

"You have to keep coming back, and you have to keep working at the government, get-

ting them to listen and say, 'The bottom line can't be the only focus. Sometimes investing in things right now to beef them up pays off longer term in savings,'" she said.

Alam adds that the government should place a stronger focus on patient outcomes in its legislation, because that is what matters most to patients.

"I have such an interest in changing the health-care system, and that's the conversation that I want to encourage because I see it already in different parts of the country and in various parts of the province, and people are saying, 'This isn't working,'" Alam said. "This is a system that was created back in the 1960s. It's not a system that's working for 2018 anymore, so I want to foster that conversation, and I want it to be thoughtful."

Alam is an anesthetist and physician based in Georgetown. Despite her new role, her local practice is something she is not willing to let go of any time soon.

Alam says she is still working at the practice part time and has hired another physician to help keep it going over the next year while she focuses on her new role with the OMA.

"Once I'm done presidency as of May 2019, I want to go back to being a doctor. I'll still continue all this health policy work that I'm interested in, but I love being a doctor and I don't want to give it up," she said.

"All the papers and research and fancy words aside, this is what I want to preserve and protect. This doctor-patient relationship."

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