CAS Engages Federal Parliamentarians on Anesthesia Workforce and Environmental Sustainability

The Canadian Anesthesiologists' Society (CAS) recently engaged federal parliamentarians and political staff as part of its ongoing advocacy efforts to address Canada's anesthesia workforce challenges and advance environmental sustainability within the healthcare system.

The discussions highlighted broad political interest in strengthening Canada's healthcare workforce, improving access to surgical care, and identifying opportunities to make healthcare delivery more efficient and sustainable.

Addressing Canada's Anesthesia Workforce Challenges

Workforce shortages continue to be a key concern across the healthcare system, with discussions emphasizing the need for coordinated federal and provincial action to address barriers to physician mobility, workforce planning and surgical capacity.

There was particular interest in developing practical policy solutions that can support the recruitment, retention and mobility of healthcare professionals while exploring innovative models of care. Anesthesia assistants were identified as one potential avenue to help address workforce pressures, with Manitoba's established model providing an opportunity to examine best practices and lessons that could be applied more broadly across Canada.

Federal immigration and workforce planning were also identified as important areas for further engagement, particularly given the role that immigration policy can play in addressing physician shortages.

Importantly, discussions reinforced that increasing the healthcare workforce alone may not be sufficient to expand surgical capacity. Provincial funding, licensing requirements and operational constraints will also need to be considered to ensure that additional workforce capacity translates into improved access to care.

Advancing Environmental Sustainability in Healthcare

Environmental sustainability was another area of significant interest, particularly opportunities to reduce waste and the environmental footprint of healthcare delivery.

CAS has an opportunity to further develop its policy work on hospital waste, single-use plastics and sustainable procurement by examining international best practices, existing Canadian and provincial procurement policies, and opportunities to support domestic solutions.

There is also an opportunity to highlight Canadian leadership on reducing the greenhouse gas emissions associated with anesthetic gases. Building awareness of successful approaches already being implemented across the country could help demonstrate practical pathways toward more sustainable healthcare delivery.

Strengthening Federal–Provincial Collaboration

A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the importance of stronger coordination between federal and provincial governments.

While the federal government has important levers through healthcare funding, immigration and national workforce planning, many decisions affecting physician licensing, healthcare delivery and surgical capacity remain within provincial jurisdiction.

CAS can play an important role in connecting these policy areas and demonstrating how coordinated action can improve access to care, strengthen healthcare capacity and ensure more efficient use of public resources.

Next Steps

The Day on the Hill discussions provided CAS with several concrete opportunities to advance its federal advocacy agenda. Immediate priorities should include further developing the anesthesia workforce policy package, advancing the environmental sustainability agenda, and pursuing stakeholder connections identified through the meetings.

CAS should continue positioning itself as a trusted source of clinical and policy expertise on anesthesia workforce planning, surgical access and environmental sustainability, while building broader political support for practical solutions that strengthen Canada's healthcare system.

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