

## BOOK REVIEW

By Julie Swettenham

Content Leader, Community for Excellence in Health Governance

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### ***Lessons Learned: Reflections of Canadian Physician Leaders***

Editor: Chris Carruthers, MD

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Why do physicians venture beyond their clinical role to take on challenging—even daunting—administrative and managerial leadership roles? *Lessons Learned* answers this question through the stories of 17 physicians who have made this leap.

Their stories are different, and cover quite a range of health leadership challenges. Paul Thistle, for example, relates how he came to run a high-demand, low-budget mission hospital in Zimbabwe. Arthur Porter tells how he came to be director general and CEO of the McGill University Health Centre. Danielle Martin reveals why she is both a comprehensive family physician and founding chair of the Canadian Doctors for Medicare. Husband and wife physicians Sylvia and Richard Cruess both moved into leadership roles and speak frankly of how they managed to do this while raising a family and remaining married.

What do all 17 physician profiles share? All are compelling, both in terms of the human stories behind the role and the challenges that these physicians have encountered in becoming leaders. These are all bright individuals who have stepped up to the leadership mark sometimes reluctantly, but often quite willingly, because they saw the need for a physician to be part of the leadership team in order to make a difference to the health system. As Philippe Couillard, physician and former Minister of Health in Quebec asks, "If we don't participate, who will?" (p. 16) Although undoubtedly readers will identify with some of the physicians more than others, all are well chosen and together thoroughly explore the many dimensions of leadership.

Some key points emerge about the particular challenges of physician leadership.

All discovered that being a physician does not a leader make. Although many initially thought that their medical credentials were enough to make them suitable leaders, they found that they required more education and had to develop different skills. After all, physician training prepares one to deal with individuals, not to lead organizations. Many of the physician leaders undertook their MBA to round out their credentials and earn the respect of other managers. And many discovered the importance of developing effective communication skills, as well as the importance of imparting their vision. Said Couillard, "human beings need direction more than authority" (p. 19) and are happier when they have a sense of where they, and their organization, are heading.

The support of others is crucial. Each of the physicians may have begun the process of leadership independently, but all had help along the way from mentors and colleagues. Said Thistle, "To become a leader, education (formal or informal) is crucial, and mentorship is mighty." (p. 3) The support of colleagues is particularly important to physician leaders, as all 17 stressed the need to continue their clinical

duties as part of their leadership role, although they could not do so to the same extent as before. All rely on colleagues to help them keep one foot in management, and the other in the clinic.

Maintaining and developing a broad base of skills is vital to successful physician leadership. Wilbert Keon speaks of the four quadrants of physician leadership: clinical, research, academic and administrative. (p. 41) It is a tall, but not impossible, order.

What do these physician leaders conclude? Leadership is a lifelong process; it is tough—and it is rewarding. Few regrets emerge from the pages of this book. *Lessons Learned* is above all a positive book with 17 ongoingly happy non-endings. It is well written and designed and is indeed a pleasant and digestible read, with a liberal number of headings and photographs. (The photograph of Dr. Tom Noseworthy in his Newfoundland Liberation Army tee shirt alone is worth the price of admission!) All the physicians emerge as distinct human beings, and their personal stories balance well with the leadership lessons they have learned.

In short, *Lessons Learned* is a joy. I suspect it will not just be read, but will be reread, by many.

*Lessons Learned: Reflections of Canadian Physician Leaders* is available from CMA at [www.cma.ca](http://www.cma.ca). The price is \$24.95 plus GST for non-CMA members and \$16.95 for CMA members.

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