

Change abounds in health leadership

Dr Kyle Hoath
AMA (WA) President

It's been a significant period for leadership change, at various levels both internally and externally. We have recently had our new AMA (WA) Chief Executive Officer Ms Jade Furness start with the organisation.

Commencing in a significant leadership role is always a little daunting, let alone providing the administrative drive for the largest independent professional organisation for medical practitioners and medical students in the State.

But Jade is well positioned for the task. She joins us after 20 years with HBF in various roles, from membership to claims management. HBF is not-for-profit and membership-based, hence establishing strong parallels with her new role. Most recently she managed 32 physiotherapy and dental clinics in two states, and was the chief of staff for the two previous HBF CEOs.

We look forward to watching her grow in the role, and providing the drive that will take us through the next significant period for the AMA (WA). Thanks to Katie Thomas, who filled in admirably and ably as interim CEO for the previous six months.

Unexpectedly, we had the announcement from the Government that Health Director General Dr Shirley Bowen is set to retire on 26 February 2027. I have enormous respect for Shirley, both as a clinician and as a leader, and have greatly valued the collaborative relationship we have built.

She has brought a willingness to listen, engage openly, and work through difficult issues together. That matters enormously to doctors who want their concerns heard, and who want to be part of improving care for their patients.

Leading WA Health is an exceptionally demanding role, so the new Director General will have their work cut out. We look forward to engaging with an incumbent of our member, Dr Bowen's calibre.

Our federal office has also had significant change, with Warwick Hough succeeding Natalia Centellas as AMA Secretary General and Group CEO. Warwick brings more than 21 years at the AMA to this vital role, and we wish him every success. We also thank Natalia for her service.

A new federal leadership team was elected at AMA26, the AMA's national conference, with Dr Michael Bonning elected President, and Dr Sarah Whitelaw the new Vice President. Both would be well known to those engaged in the work of the AMA, and will no doubt bring significant energy and focus to their two years in the role. Congratulations to Dr Danielle McMullen and A/Prof Julian Rait for completing a very rigorous and targeted two years in those big chairs.

One of our own, Dr Ramya Raman, is President-elect of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) after a resounding election victory.

Having worked with Ramya on the AMA (WA) Council, I had no hesitation in strongly endorsing her for the position. It was no surprise that she took on the task of demonstrating her ability to a national audience to garner the necessary majority.

It is of some strategic importance for the AMA (WA) to have a person we know so well in such a significant role, but moreover one with such an obvious passion for general practice and willing to accept the demands of leadership.

As Ramya said: "General practice is the foundation of Australia's healthcare system. Every day, GPs care for Australians at every stage of life, keeping people healthier, supporting them through complexity, and helping keep them out of hospital.

"A strong health system needs strong general practice. My focus as President will be on ensuring GPs are properly valued, funded and supported to provide the high-quality care their patients and communities rely on.

"That means working constructively with governments, but also advocating strongly when change is needed. We need sustainable funding for general practice, a strong and supported GP workforce, and better access to care for patients wherever they live."

Clearly there is no shortage of issues to be addressed in primary, secondary and tertiary care for our leadership group. Nor can we separate the demands of health from the wider societal pressures affecting us all.

We can take comfort in having such an enlightened and compassionate group of leaders tackling these challenges. We wish them all the very best in their various roles. And again, we thank Shirley for her service and will continue to engage with her constructively in the lead-up to her retirement. ■

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