

## Dr. Hirotaka Yamashiro wins member referendum for OMA president; council votes this weekend

Written by Tristan Bronca on April 30, 2019 for CanadianHealthcareNetwork.ca

Although the pediatrician received the most votes in an association-wide referendum, council will cast the decisive vote at a meeting this coming weekend

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Toronto – Dr. Hirotaka Yamashiro is slated to become the president-elect of the Ontario Medical Association following a membership-wide vote—but his election to the post is not a forgone conclusion. The final decision will be made by the OMA’s governing council at their Spring meeting this upcoming weekend.



Dr. Hirotaka Yamashiro

Dr. Yamashiro was running against [two other candidates](#): Dr. Rachel Forman, an ob/gyn in downtown Toronto and Scarborough, and Dr. Samantha Hill, a cardiac surgeon in Toronto. Dr. Yamashiro received 1,241 first place votes, followed by 789 for Dr. Hill and 707 for Dr. Forman.

While support from the general and family practice assembly was split evenly between the three candidates, Dr. Yamashiro appeared to receive the lion’s share of the vote from the pediatrics, neurology and psychiatry sections, while Dr. Hill received most support from neuroradiology, as well as most votes from vascular surgery, cardiac surgery and diagnostic imaging.

This membership-wide referendum was introduced in 2018, prompted, in part, by [a vote of non-confidence](#) in the OMA’s six-member executive during a particularly turbulent period in the organization’s history. It was intended to give members beyond the 200-or-so person council a say in who led the association. In the election that followed, council elected the president as chosen in the membership referendum—Dr. Sohail Gandhi, the president-elect who will begin his term as president this coming weekend.

But voter turnout was low again this year (there were just over 2,700 votes cast out of approximately 34,000 who could have voted; last year there were 2,335) and Dr. Yamashiro told the *Medical Post* that the council vote is not simply a formality. "Some people think my work is done but I don't look at it that way at all," he said. "I'm asking for council's support."

Dr. Yamashiro is a pediatrician and the head of the Pediatricians Alliance of Ontario. For the last 15 years he has been closely involved in the OMA, having sat on the board and on a number of high-profile committees including the one on negotiations (full disclosure, he is also a member of the *Medical Post's* advisory board, though our publication is not associated with the OMA). But he also said he would like to see some changes to OMA advocacy. He told the *Medical Post* he would like grassroots efforts play a more prominent role in the OMA, and to see mechanisms of policy-making less centralized.

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If he is elected by council, his tenure as president will begin around the same time the OMA is re-entering contract negotiations with the Ontario government—just one year after an arbitration panel [decided on the terms](#) of a contract that had deadlocked doctors and the government for more than four years. It also comes at a time when a certain number of specialists have expressed interest in breaking away from the OMA to [form their own specialist association](#), a move that was motivated, in part, by council's [decision last year](#) to redistribute funding for higher paid specialities to lower paid ones (that decision was later reversed by council in a second vote after the board said it would [not support the motion](#)).

In a Twitter thread, Dr. Jonathan Lipszyc, a family doctor in North York, correctly pointed out that the voting in this referendum vote was split along relativity lines. "Higher billers voted for (Dr. Hill) and lower billers for (Dr. Yamashiro)," he said. "Lower billers won out, rightfully so."

"What happens if council votes for someone else?" he then asked.

"Then someone else becomes president-elect, and council makes a mockery of the OMA's own initiative around better engagement and connection with the broader membership," replied London, Ont.'s Dr. Frank Warsh. Dr. Warsh said he thought all three candidates were "respected, capable, and excellent," but Dr. Lipszyc also pointed out that "some" held positions on the OMA board that worked under the six-member executive that was removed—a possible reference to both Dr. Yamashiro and Dr. Forman who were on the board in 2016-17.

"Will be interesting to see what happens," he added.

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