



## **CAME Voice/Voix**

### **The North Dakota Coastline Effect – Dr. Rachel Ellaway**

As I write this piece the 2014 American Association of Medical Colleges' (AAMC's) annual education and general meetings have just finished in Chicago. I'd like to share some thoughts with you regarding the meetings. The first thing is the education meeting was separated from the main meeting this year for the first time. In addition to separate registration processes, venues and a somewhat reduced capacity of the education meeting, the split between the two was confused somewhat by two out of the three education plenaries focusing on fiscal strategy, and at least two in the main meeting plenaries focusing on educational matters (actor Alan Alda on empathy and psychologist Mahzarin Banaji on cognitive bias). However, this is not my main theme for this piece.

Time after time the AAMC and the many presenters represented North America as the lower 48 states, sometimes with Alaska and Hawaii thrown in. The only time I saw a map that included Canada was in the plenary presentation from our own Dave Davis. Now it wasn't as if Canadian medical education didn't have a presence at the AAMC meetings; Canadian scholars were prominent in the research in medical education (RIME) track, most of the UME Deans were there for a full-day meeting, there was an AFMC booth and reception, and those of us roaming the halls and corridors were easily spotted by our Remembrance Day poppies.

The AAMC represents "all 141 accredited U.S. and 17 accredited Canadian medical schools"; we therefore constitute roughly 12% of the AAMC's constituency. We can (and some of us do) use AAMC resources (such as the GEA, the GIR, MedEdPortal, and the journal *Academic Medicine*), and we might reasonably expect to have a greater presence in its activities as well as influencing its policies and direction. So why are we so invisible when we are so very present? Dr. Banaji and her book "Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People" gives us a clue: I call this particular phenomenon the North Dakota Coastline effect, a cognitive bias whereby otherwise rational and well-meaning US medical educators perceive their world as stopping at the North Dakota coastline, presumably along with cliffs, seabirds, and salty trawlermen with their sea shanties and stories of the deep.

At a time when it would seem that, through the many innovations in Canadian medical education, we have potential answers to many of our US sister schools' challenges (particularly around the social contract for medical education) there is a need (as well as a right) for our voices to be heard in an organization in which our medical schools hold membership. Maybe next year in Baltimore will be different ...