

# Using Difficult Conversations to Build Trust

Daniel Hereth, Secretary | Wisconsin Department of Safety  
and Professional Services

Chris Hacker, Registrar/CEO | BC College of  
Oral Health Professionals





# Health professions regulation in Canada

- Federated model
  - Provincial and territorial jurisdiction
- Individual health professions colleges
  - Set standards
  - License practitioners
  - Oversee practice
  - Manage complaints



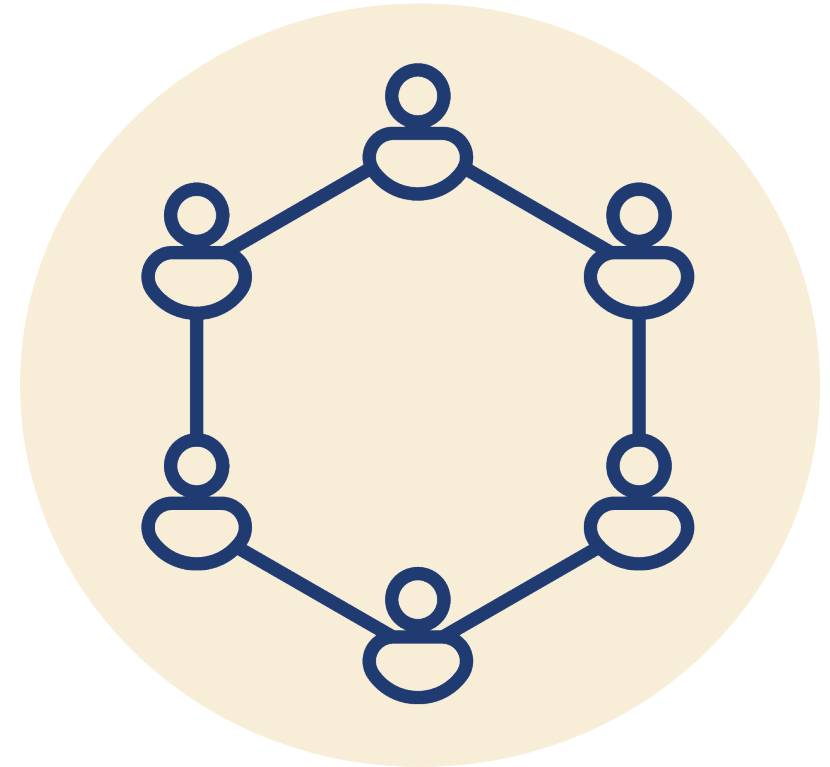
# Regulatory modernization

- Moving towards a more transparent, public-centred, team-based oversight
- Increased commitment to cultural safety and humility, especially towards Indigenous peoples
- Balance between regulatory autonomy and strong public accountability



# Team-based oversight

- Health care is becoming more and more integrated
  - Autocratic siloed master to team-based expert
- Regulatory efficiency and efficacy
  - Amalgamation



# Amalgamation: a difficult conversation



- Stakeholders:
  - Public
  - Ministry of Health
  - Individual oral health colleges
    - Boards
    - Staff teams
  - Regulated oral health professionals
  - Associations



# Amalgamation: a difficult conversation



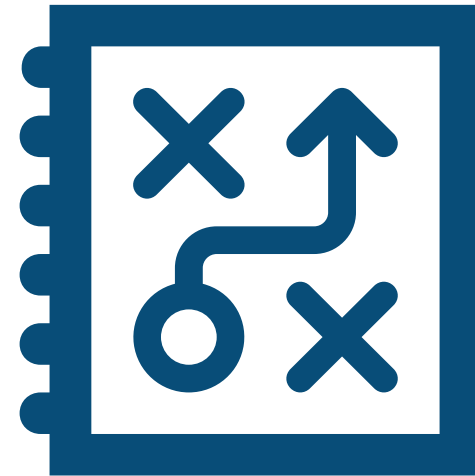
- Preparation
- Mindset and approach
- Execution and communication techniques
- Collaborative problem-solving



# Amalgamation: a difficult conversation

## Preparation

- Determining purpose
  - What you hope to accomplish
- Acknowledge your own biases/feelings
- Prepare, don't script



# Amalgamation: a difficult conversation

## Mindset and approach

- Perception vs. perspective
  - Leading with curiosity and empathy
- Staying calm and centred
- Focus on collaboration
  - Relational vs. transactional
- Acknowledging interests
- Active listening





# Amalgamation: a difficult conversation

## Execution and communication techniques

- Avoid absolutes
- “I” statements



# Amalgamation: a difficult conversation

## **Collaborative problem-solving**

- Meeting norms
- Shared values
- Shared vision





# Questions?

Chris Hacker | [chris.hacker@oralhealthbc.ca](mailto:chris.hacker@oralhealthbc.ca)



# Leadership in Crisis Starts with Difficult Conversations

- You don't need to have all the answers
- Ignore the pressure to be perfect
- Be present, transparent and willing to listen
- Good systems don't rely on perfect leaders. Focus on building shared responsibility and clear support structures





# The Crisis We Faced

- Older, mostly manual license processing systems
- Inability to process applications quickly highlighted by pressures of the pandemic
- We worked to find funding to build a faster, modern application platform, but while that was in process we faced growing criticism from professional and legislative stakeholders





# Led to what we later called the Apology Tour

Others were framing our story, not always completely accurately

So, we toured the state, going in person to even our most rural communities and convening conversations that included healthcare systems, educational partners, and leaders from our regulated professions

The goal: Show we recognized their concerns and were excited about working collaboratively on solutions



# If apologies tours aren't about apologizing, what are they about? Accountability.

Challenges not excuses = Trust through transparency

- Level set about the challenges faced
- Correct misinformation
- Show command of the issues and what is already being done to address them



# If apologies tours aren't about apologizing, what are they about? Collaboration.

- Clarify what is within your control and where partnership is needed
- Collaboration and shared decision making create empathy and buy-in
  - Collaboration is a two-way street



# If apologies tours aren't about apologizing, what are they about? Results.

A pathway to achieving results:

- Explain how you are working to improve systems
- Create a shared definition of success
- Tell them how they can contribute



# If apologies tours aren't about apologizing, what are they about? Critics to Advocates

What you gain by publicly thanking and crediting stakeholders:

- Diffuse criticism
- Enhance buy-in
- Create ownership





# Final Thoughts

Good systems don't rely on perfect leaders. They build shared responsibility and clear support structures.

The short-term payoffs are decreased criticism and systemic improvement.

The long-term payoff is sustained and increased support.



# Questions?

Chris Hacker | [chris.hacker@oralhealthbc.ca](mailto:chris.hacker@oralhealthbc.ca)

Dan Hereth | [Daniel.Hereth@wisconsin.gov](mailto:Daniel.Hereth@wisconsin.gov)

