



March 5, 2020

The Honourable Tyler Shandro
Minister of Health
423 Legislature Building
10800 97 Avenue
Edmonton AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Shandro:

Re: COVID-19 Pandemic Planning and Communication for Family Physicians

This letter is to address a negligent gap in Alberta Health's (AH) COVID-19 pandemic preparedness for community family physicians, which puts the public and health care professionals at risk. The Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association (EZMSA) represents 1,600 physicians for local issues in the Edmonton zone. As physicians in the Edmonton zone, we are extremely troubled about the lack of readiness by this government for COVID-19.

On March 3, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) stated "countries should be preparing for sustained community transmission" and a 3.4% death rate for COVID-19. Health Canada has confirmed 34 cases in Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec. Alberta is one flight away from COVID-19 in our province. AH is unwisely wasting precious time we do not have and not preparing our front line community physicians for this pandemic.

We request the following:

- Community family physicians be included in COVID-19 planning and communications because not all of them are part of Alberta Health Services (AHS) or belong to a Primary Care Network.
- E-mail updates from the AH and sent by the College of Physicians and Surgeons when significant changes occur. We cannot predict when the AHS website is updated and should not be informed through the media. It is reckless to not send direct communication resulting in physicians depending on media updates for current information.
- Information about the role of community family physicians in the greater health care system during the pandemic.
- A list and recommendations of personal protective equipment to be supplied by AH for family practices.



- A plan for supplying personal protective equipment as suppliers are out of stock for these items. The WHO has confirmed health care workers are endangered from a shortage of personal protective equipment. Front line health care workers must receive equipment. Edmonton doctors are unable to buy masks from their regular supplier.
- Instructions to direct symptomatic presenting patients.
- Guidance to answer public inquiries.
- Screening of feverish patients before entering a family practice.
- Information on the liability of clinic owners if staff become ill with COVID-19.
- Information on billing codes activated for telephone management, as was the case in the last pandemic.
- AH deliver a plan to bring temporary physicians for additional workforce to meet the additional care demand.
- Information about recruiting general practitioners for pandemic clinics or hospital tents.
- Informing the public that they will not be given a sick note to prevent ill patients from spreading COVID-19 in health care facilities.
- Information on the role of house visits.

The WHO also stated “it is absolutely essential that countries do not lose this opportunity to strengthen their preparedness systems”. The EZMSA aims to work with AHS and AH to prepare and communicate with community family physicians. We offer to meet and discuss these requests as our members are community family physicians with experience in pandemic planning. Community family physicians are the front line to receive the first case and it is too late to prepare them after COVID-19 is detected in Alberta.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ernst Schuster
President, Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association

AF/bjh

CC: Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Lorna Rosen, Deputy Minister of Health
Dr. Verna Yiu, President & CEO, AHS
Dr. Scott McLeod, Registrar, College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta