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Patients Paying Out-of-Pocket for Cancer Diagnosis Exams

Edmonton, AB: Today, long waitlists for publically funded MRI and CT exams in Edmonton are causing patients to turn to paying \$375-800 out-pocket for private testing. Private fees are not covered by the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan. In some cases doctors are paying the fees for their severely ill patients who cannot afford the fees. They are also advising some patients to go to the U.S. to receive care.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Computed Tomography (CT) exams are diagnostic tools doctors use to identify if a patient has cancer and the stage of the cancer. It is also important for establishing treatment. Delays with wait times put people's life at risk and increases total health care cost. In addition to cancer diagnostics, these exams are needed to diagnose a stroke, multiple sclerosis and other significant illnesses.

Patients at risk

Doctors are sounding the alarm that current wait times for MRI and CT exams put patients at risk. In Edmonton, patients are waiting longer than before and for more days than other provinces. The average wait time is 375 days today for a MRI exam at the University of Alberta Hospital. In our neighbour provinces patients are waiting 30 days in Saskatchewan and 44 days in British Columbia. Patients are waiting an average of 297 days today for a CT exam at the Leduc Community Hospital. Next door, patients are waiting 17 days in Saskatchewan and 21 days in BC.

A growing and aging population means more patients need MRI and CT exams every year. The Government of Alberta is not providing consistent, increased public funding to meet demand. In the last seven years, the number of people waiting has grown 75% for MRI exams and 341% of CT exams. The Government **must** respond to meet the increased demand.

Ignoring public health care

Not providing publically funded MRI and CT exams ignores the *Canada Health Act* requirements of patient access to public medically necessary services. When patients cannot receive public medical services and must resort to paying their own fees, it is contrary to the Canadian principle that the delivery of health care should be based on need not wealth. With the recent release of the AHS review and government's intent to save \$1.9 billion in health care funding, adequate and necessary public funding of MRI and CT exams appears even more unlikely.

Doctors in Edmonton are extremely concerned for their patients and what this means to Canadian public health care.

About EZMSA: The EZMSA represents 1,600 physicians for local issues in the Edmonton Zone. The EZMSA works closely with the Alberta Medical Association (AMA); however, these are separate organizations with different mandates. The EZMSA is the formal voice of advocacy for physicians in the Edmonton Zone while the AMA advocates for provincial issues.

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