



The President's Letter

Dr. Noel W. Grisdale



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Dear Member:

Mental health services in Alberta

Decisions are being made in Alberta that affect access to quality care. For example, last week the Provincial Government announced that the Stollery Children's Hospital emergency department expansion would go forward. This is a welcome development for families, sick children and physicians alike.

Other news, however, has been cause for concern. On August 14, Alberta Health Services announced its decision not to go ahead with a planned redevelopment project at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

While recognizing the need for changes in health care, the Alberta Medical Association (AMA) has also been advocating for a more rigorous and transparent planning process to ensure that what is done actually leads to improved, timely access to quality care – and puts Patients First®.

In the absence of such a process, the Alberta Hospital announcement raises many questions:

- What is the projected need for acute mental health beds?
- Are additional beds needed? Where will these beds be located? When will they be available?
- What additional support will be provided for care in the community?

Physicians, nurses, community workers, police and others are asking – and need answers before the changes at Alberta Hospital Edmonton are implemented. Previous attempts to close mental health beds and download patients into the community have failed because the required supports were not in place.

Patients who are inappropriately released to community placements, or released to community placements that are insufficient for their needs, too often end up homeless and if they find themselves back in the acute care system, quite likely they will be in greater distress than when they were discharged.

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The pivotal question is: What is the right or ideal mix of acute beds to community support services?

Work has been done and studies conducted to explore this issue, but we have yet to see the results, particularly the evidence proving that fewer acute care beds for the mentally ill is the right way to address their needs!

Mental health issues touch all Albertans. Mental health care is a part of the system that several health care commissions and studies have found to be lacking in support. We need to know what plans Alberta Health Services has to ensure that greater attention is paid to services and facilities that care for some of our most vulnerable patients.

Raising money for student bursaries

Once again this year, the AMA co-hosted with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta the North-South Doctors' Golf Tournament. Now in its 82nd year, the tournament raises funds for the AMA/Canadian Medical Foundation (CMF) Medical Student Bursary program.

The July 27 event at the Red Deer Golf and Country Club raised \$27,000. Since the bursary program's inception in 2001, the AMA has contributed roughly \$330,000, matched by the CMF, to provide over 440 bursaries of \$1,500.

The golf tournament is only one way that the AMA assists our medical students. Through the Committee on Student Affairs, the AMA annually provides over \$10,000 to support events promoting medical student health, wellness and life balance. The AMA's contributions are an important part of recognizing that students are the future of our profession.

Yours truly,

Noel W. Grisdale, MD, CCFP
President