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# The President's Letter

*Dr. Christopher J.(Chip) Doig*



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November 3, 2009

Dear Member:

## **Code for H1N1 telephone advice**

On Friday, October 30, you should have received an email from me detailing how to bill a new health service code – 03.01AD Telephone advice to patient or agent regarding H1N1 virus – under the Schedule of Medical Benefits.

This fee, reached in discussions between the Alberta Medical Association (AMA), Alberta Health Services (AHS) and Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW), was implemented and available for billing as of October 30. It can be used by any and all physicians, not just those who have or may register under the AHS Pandemic Influenza Plan as will be discussed later in this letter.

Many physicians have already begun to make use of this code and I certainly encourage all to do so when appropriate. It's an excellent opportunity to provide optimal service by advising and assisting our patients without unnecessarily exposing our staff or other patients to infection. (For further information visit: <http://www.albertadoctors.org/PresLet/Index.>)

## **Pandemic H1N1 Influenza Physician Payment Plan 2009/2010**

In my October 22 *President's Letter*, I told you that the AMA continued to meet with AHS and AHW regarding payment for physicians working in a pandemic response plan. Regarding confusion in the media about what had and had not been agreed, I wrote:

“The AMA and the minister note that:

1. The provisions announced by the minister are to cover many situations, but not all.
2. In particular, if a severe pandemic does occur then the provisions outlined in the August 14 *President's Letter* (<http://www.albertadoctors.org/PresLetter/Aug14-09>) will be used as necessary.
3. The conditions of using the various elements remain to be developed – this is a priority to be worked out with the AMA.

4. The aim in the next while is to have an understanding between AHW and AMA on all the major components of the program and the conditions of the use of its various components."

Today, I am pleased to be able to provide you with more details of the programs and conditions.

Attached is the document *Pandemic H1N1 Influenza Physician Payment Plan 2009/2010* as agreed to by the AMA, AHW and AHS. (You may also view it at <http://www.albertadoctors.org/PresLet/Index>.) It "outlines the criteria and processes which Alberta Health and Wellness may choose to implement in order to coordinate the setup and issuance of physician payment, in the event that the Alberta Pandemic Influenza Plan is activated."

Alberta Health and Wellness and Dr. André Corriveau, Chief Medical Officer of Health, have authority to implement any stages or components of the overall Alberta Pandemic Influenza Plan as circumstances demand. The newly initiated fee for telephone advice is one part of that plan, while other parts of the plan have not yet been activated.

As noted, the hourly rate physician payment provisions outlined in Dr. Noel W. Grisdale's August 14 *President's Letter* will still apply as necessary in the event of an extreme pandemic situation if and when declared by Cabinet.

Otherwise, AHW has not yet, but may still, activate some or all of the plan outlined in the *Pandemic H1N1 Influenza Physician Payment Plan 2009/2010* as it is required. (Please note, the only exception is the telephone advice fee noted under "Payment Plan Elements" which, as discussed above, has already been implemented.)

Other components include:

- Liability insurance
- Short-term disability
- Temporary compensation - hourly rates
- Business interruption
- Elevated compensation - hourly rates

Please note that to be eligible for these components, you must register with AHS for the purposes of providing services within the AHS pandemic response plan. The response plan has two service areas: (i) to care for influenza patients or (ii) to continue to meet the other health care needs of Albertans. Registration with AHS will confirm that you are participating in one of these components without committing or restricting yourself to either component.

To register, visit the AHS pandemic H1N1 page for physicians:

<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/840.asp> and click on the button "H1N1 Physician Link: Register here for pandemic response support."

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I will continue to keep you informed about new developments. The AMA will assist AHS by posting physician-relevant documents on our pandemic webpage at <http://www.albertadoctors.org/TopicsofInterest/H1N1>.

Finally, a word about the H1N1 vaccination. When more is available, I would like to encourage physicians to provide the vaccine to your patients. Most Albertans want to be vaccinated, and being able to obtain the service in physician offices will help to reduce confusion and frustration. Physicians can and should help: once again, putting Patients First®.

Yours truly,

Christopher J. (Chip) Doig, MD, MSc, FRCPC  
President