
The President's Letter

Dr. Darryl D. LaBuick



Patients First® *Patients First® is a registered trademark of the Alberta Medical Association.*

May 16, 2008

Dear Member:

In a dramatic announcement yesterday, Minister of Health and Wellness Ron Liepert created a new, single, provincial entity – the Alberta Health Services Board – to replace the boards of Alberta’s nine regional health authorities (RHAs), the Alberta Mental Health Commission, Alberta Cancer Board and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. The new board took over immediately.

In media interviews, I applauded the minister for his stated emphasis on a system that is “focused on the patient.” The Alberta Medical Association (AMA) believes so strongly in this focus that we have trademarked the phrase Patients First®.

The new direction for Alberta’s health care system also reflects an approach the AMA has long promoted – a provincial framework for policy, standards and outcomes while allowing local flexibility in meeting the requirements. A stronger provincial framework is now possible. Local flexibility, however, has potential to create the greatest challenge for government in this new direction.

AMA’s trilateral relationships will be impacted. Under the trilateral master agreement, the AMA dealt with Alberta Health and Wellness and nine RHAs. Now, there are only three parties: AMA, Alberta Health and Wellness, and the new single health authority.

There is debate ahead about what so much change will mean to the governance of Alberta’s health care system. Physicians, at least, can be clear in our role as agents of our patients. As always, our duty will be to act in their best interests and serve as their advocates. This is a responsibility we have always been willing to accept.

Key for this new trilateral relationship is the current negotiations for a new three-year fiscal agreement. Negotiations 2008 are about many elements that are consistent with the minister’s objectives including an increase in physicians, primary care networks and electronic medical records.

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I will write again as more information is available. To view Minister Liepert's announcement:
<http://alberta.ca/home/NewsFrame.cfm?ReleaseID=/acn/200805/23523ED9498C0-0827-451C-E98A0B8430DC1879.html>.

Yours truly,

Darryl D. LaBuick, MD, CCFP
President