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The President's Letter

Dr. Darryl D. LaBuick



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Dear Member:

As you likely heard in the news yesterday, four of the top physicians in the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health are leaving their positions with Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW). This office provides an essential, core function in protecting the health of Albertans.

The Alberta Medical Association is very concerned about the gap in public health services that could be created.

Dr. Karen Grimsrud, the acting chief medical officer of health, Dr. Gloria Keays, a provincial medical officer of health, and Dr. Ameeta Singh, the infectious disease consultant, are leaving their positions. A fourth physician, Dr. Shainoor Virani, an acting deputy chief medical officer of health, previously left the department.

Effective health surveillance is crucial and must be supported by a firm infrastructure of public health policy, disease control and prevention strategies, and the readiness to respond decisively when a threat to public health – such as disease outbreak or an emerging health issue – is detected. Communication and coordination in health emergencies are also essential.

The Alberta Health and Wellness business plan recognizes the importance of protecting Albertans' public health needs. Goal Six is "Public Confidence" and it states:

"The Ministry is responsible for assuring the public that their health will be protected and that their health needs will be met in an appropriate and safe manner. The Ministry develops emergency preparedness and response plans to deal with disease outbreaks and other public health threats."

Strategies in the AHW business plan address the need to "protect Albertans against public health threats by strengthening the health system's capacity to prevent, prepare for and respond to risks" and to "implement infection prevention and control strategies and standards to reduce infections acquired in health facilities or in the community."

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To ensure that these goals and strategies are realized and that the health of Albertans is protected, it is important that the issues in the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health are urgently addressed. We trust that the minister of health and wellness will do so promptly.

Yours truly,

Darryl D. LaBuick, MD, CCFP
President