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# The President's Letter

*Dr. Christopher J.(Chip) Doig*



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Dear Member:

The announcement from Alberta Health Services (AHS) that physicians can order the H1N1 vaccine and should be able to begin offering it in their offices next week is welcome news – for public and individual health care, and for increasing accessibility.

Many physicians, of course, have been very busy providing care and advice related to the H1N1 pandemic. Based on physician enquiries to the Alberta Medical Association (AMA), however, many physicians are willing to do even more and provide this vital service.

Details on how physicians can obtain the vaccine are in Wednesday's memo to all physicians from Dr. David Megran, AHS' senior physician executive. Information is also available at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/660.asp> or email [AHS.ECC@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:AHS.ECC@albertahealthservices.ca).

Physicians' participation will also send a strong message about the importance of the vaccination, not only as protection for this second wave of H1N1 but also for the third wave predicted for 2010.

Some Albertans appear to question the necessity and safety of being vaccinated. Our direct involvement is a strong signal of our support for this safe and effective defense mechanism.

A welcome development has been public health officials asking employers and others not to require "sick notes" during the pandemic. Persons with mild disease need to stay at home and avoid contacting others. Asking them to get a doctor's note would mean making them attend physician offices, emergency departments, etc. Not only would this be a waste of doctors' time, but it would also potentially expose others.

"Sick notes" are an HR issue of employers; they are not a health care service covered by Medicare. I would encourage you to tell your patients that employers should NOT request sick notes during a pandemic.

Because of the demands on physicians, especially family physicians and pediatricians, and on primary care networks, the AMA has been in discussions with Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW) and AHS regarding compensation in these extraordinary times.

We have been working with AHS and AHW on a telephone advice fee similar to what has been instituted in British Columbia and Saskatchewan. I anticipate that such a fee will soon come into effect as part of AHW's H1N1 Pandemic Physician Payment Plan.

Physicians are being asked to consider registering with AHS to be part of the pandemic response plan. If physicians do this and are activated from the roster, e.g., to work in influenza assessment clinics, the expectation is these physicians will utilize existing payment and administrative processes (i.e., billing fee for service) unless extraordinary circumstances arise.

This H1N1 pandemic is impacting many aspects of Alberta's health care system, and I am impressed by and proud of – but not surprised by – the contributions and efforts of all health professionals. In saying so, it is especially important to recognize the work done by our nursing colleagues in the immunization clinics.

As physicians, we do not always agree with government or administration. Regarding the current H1N1 pandemic, though, it is important to recognize their concerns and their efforts too.

From my conversations with Health and Wellness Minister Ron Liepert, from the AMA's meeting with the government's Calgary Caucus and from the exchanges in Question Period, it is obvious MLAs share the medical profession's goal that Alberta deal effectively and efficiently with the H1N1 pandemic – Patients First®.

Yours truly,

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