
The President's Letter

Dr. Christopher J.(Chip) Doig



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Dear Member:

Allocation 2010-11

At its October 23 meeting, the Alberta Medical Association (AMA) Board of Directors discussed the April 1, 2010 allocation of the 4.5% increase for physician fees negotiated in the 2008 amending agreement.

Three main components provide funds to sections through an allocation:

1. An adjustment for overhead costs
2. Priority pool funding for targeted items or sections
3. A dollar amount per full-time-equivalent (FTE) physician in each section

Decisions on allocation need to be made far in advance for two reasons: allocation is a trilateral process and involves input from Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW) and Alberta Health Services (AHS), and time is required to allow AHW to change computer payment systems.

Therefore, the board made a number of decisions that make up the AMA's recommendations for next year's allocation. The final allocation decision is made at the trilateral Physician Services Committee, as defined in the trilateral agreement.

1. Adjustment for overhead costs

The board discussed allocation allowances to cover increases in physicians' overhead costs. This component of allocation to sections is determined as a percentage increase that is then applied to a pre-established base for overhead costs for each section.

We had hoped to have the results of the Physician Business Costs Study, conducted in late summer and fall, for this allocation; however, the results were not available, and this is disappointing.

The board approved a 2% allowance to account for increasing costs in overhead. Although the rates of inflation in Alberta have slowed, we have heard from many physicians that the costs of doing business have not necessarily followed the general rate of inflation, hence the necessity for ongoing adjustments for overhead.

2. Priority pool funding

In February, sections were notified that the board was not soliciting requests to fund targeted items or sections for the 2010-11 allocation. The board reaffirmed this decision at its October meeting.

You may recall that, in the 2008-09 allocation, funds were allocated to implement the after-hours' payment changes. Sections affected by the after-hours payment changes received priority pool funding amounting to 50% of the cost to implement the changes for their sections. These sections were then required to cover the remaining 50% of the costs from their own funds that were allocated to the section through overhead and per-FTE payments.

Several of the affected sections requested that the board consider allocating additional priority pool funding in the upcoming allocation, targeted to cover the 50% that sections contributed last year. After considerable discussion, the board reaffirmed its original decision and did not apply any funds for this purpose for the 2010-11 allocation.

The board did not apply any funds to priority pool funding for this allocation. This decision applies to other sections that made requests for priority pool funding, as well.

3. Per-FTE payments

Because the AMA is not designating funds to priority items, the remaining funds after overhead allocation will be directed to sections as a dollar amount per full-time-equivalent (FTE) payments.

Policy work is ongoing to revise the physician FTE definition. We have already improved the way we account for alternate relationship plan physicians in the FTE allocation.

We are validating the new FTE definition for all physicians, through receiving feedback from sections and discussing changes with our trilateral partners. This work will take some time to complete, but when finished it should provide a more accurate picture.

Billing for services provided to RCMP

You should have received the Alberta Health and Wellness Bulletin regarding reimbursement for medical services provided to RCMP members. Effective November 1, AHW began a two-year pilot-project to enroll and administer payments of basic health service claims for RCMP members in Alberta.

Once enrolled, RCMP members will have a very similar health card to the ones carried by other Albertans. Physicians may submit claims for insured health services provided to RCMP just as they do for services for any other Albertan. Claims will be processed in accordance with the general rules and assessment criteria in the Schedule of Medical Benefits for insured services. This should help to streamline your office processes and expedite payments when you bill for services provided to RCMP members.

To validate an RCMP member's eligibility, call 780.422.1600 in the Edmonton area, or dial toll-free 1.888.422.6257 from elsewhere in Alberta.

Finding Balance launches falls' prevention advocacy program for second year

Advocacy is an important role for the AMA and, to this end, for the second year running, the AMA has partnered with the Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research (ACICR) to implement the *Finding Balance – Prevent a fall before it happens* campaign. Along with Kathy Belton, ACICR Associate Director and MLA George Vanderburg, Chair of the Seniors' Advisory Council, I participated in the November 3 news conference launch of this public awareness and advocacy campaign, at the AMA.

Campaign messages, targeted to seniors and their caregivers, help raise awareness of falls' risks and provide tips on falls prevention. I have first-hand experience with this as my mother experienced serious injuries subsequent to a fall down some stairs last year.

To supplement your counseling on preventing falls, the AMA can provide patient handouts with three key messages:

- **Keep active - Exercise for strength and balance**
 - Check with your doctor about the best type of exercise for you.
- **Check your medications - Talk to your doctor or pharmacist**
 - Tell you doctor about all the medications you are taking, including over-the-counter pills and supplements; be careful with alcohol
- **Watch your step - Wherever you are**
 - Make sure your pathways are free of clutter and well-lighted, wear supportive footwear and have your eyes checked once a year.

To order materials, contact Joanne J. Askewe, Administrative Assistant, Professional Affairs email: joanne.askewe@albertadoctors.org, telephone: 780.482.2626, ext. 224, or toll-free 1.800.272.9680, ext. 224.

H1N1

I know that right now physicians are stretched with H1N1 hitting their patients and the uncertainties arising as the situation changes. Criticism about the initial delivery of vaccinations in limited clinics with subsequent long line-ups is understandable. The changes implemented by AHS have significantly improved the clinics' performance and it is laudable that over 550,000 Albertans have been vaccinated.

Primary prevention by good respiratory hygiene and vaccination remain the most important public health initiatives. We hope that vaccine access through physician offices will soon be implemented and await AHS decision on this matter.

It is important to recognize the hard work of physicians and other health professionals caring for patients with H1N1. Of special note, hospital-based physicians and health professionals have been doing an excellent job caring for those who become very ill. At times, up to one-third of all ICU beds have been occupied by patients critically ill from H1N1. It is a credit to the front-line caregivers that these patients have been cared for with little fanfare or impact on other services in the hospital, although some elective surgeries have been cancelled.

We will continue to update you on information as we get it, as well as on other items that concern us in easier times.

Yours truly,

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