It is with extreme concern that I write to you today, my fellow family physicians. I fear that the patient-centered care we have been working so hard to deliver through the Patient’s Medical Home model is in true and immediate jeopardy in Alberta.

As you will have seen in the AMA President’s Letter today, Alberta Health (AH) recently notified the AMA that they were initiating a 30 day “consultation” period to consult on 11 proposed initiatives. These proposals represent very significant changes that government may unilaterally impose on us as early as Jan-Feb 2020. I encourage all family physicians to read attentively through the proposals, as (if implemented) they will have a significant and indisputably negative impact on your patients, your team and on your family medicine practice.

Family docs taking 85% of the hit

The AMA has provided a preliminary assessment of the government’s proposals and, in short, the proposals that they have put forward constitute an estimated $262 million being abruptly withdrawn from specific codes and a delisting of services. 85% of all of the proposed reductions ($224 million) are targeted directly at family physicians.

Community-based family physicians will be hit hardest

Overall, if the reductions were evenly distributed among all family physicians, they would represent a 15% reduction to the average family medicine physician’s FFS income. But the reductions are not evenly distributed. As disturbing as the 15% targeted reduction to family medicine is, it is even more worrisome when you consider the disproportionate impact this would have on community-based family physicians who are already struggling to manage increasingly complex patients through improved access and comprehensive, team-based care. All of which are integral parts of the Patient’s Medical Home.

In my SFM Bulletin last week, I wrote to you about the genuine and substantial efforts that our family medicine leaders have made over the past years to form good working partnerships with AH and AHS. We have worked with AH on their CPAR/CII initiatives, struggled with ever-increasing overheads to fund the teams needed for the Patient’s Medical Home model and have partnered with AH and AHS to build the PCN structures that have made Alberta number-one in the country in terms of the CFPC “Patient’s Medical Home Report Card.” We even offered to help design and rollout the government’s Surgical Wait List Initiative. We have gone above and beyond to be a good partner to government in the hopes of bettering the care we can offer to our patients and our communities. Unfortunately, the damage these haphazard proposals will wreak on this working relationship could potentially be massive.

The devastation these unilateral AH impositions will wreak cannot be overstated. There is a significant danger that family doctors will become completely disengaged from the health system as a whole, team members will need to be laid off and some family physician clinics will simply have to close their doors.
**Impact on patients**

Most concerning is what all of this will mean for patients. What will this do to patient access and outcomes? This budgetary “cash-grab” will come on the backs of our patients and their families. We, as family physicians who struggle every day to offer the best care we can to our patients, simply CANNOT accede to such careless destruction of comprehensive, quality family medicine in our province.

I will be writing to you again shortly about our strategy in terms of communicating this message - alongside the AMA and our patients - to AH and the Alberta government as a whole. I have been communicating frequently with our AMA President, Dr. Christine Molnar, and she has assured me that the AMA fully recognizes that this is an unconscionable attack on primary care. Our colleagues support family medicine and the Patient’s Medical Home and recognize primary care as the cornerstone of our health care system. They’ve got our backs and are ready to go to bat right alongside us.

**A call to action**

This truly is a watershed moment for health care in Alberta – for family medicine in particular and for the AMA as a whole.

We call on our specialist colleagues to help us declare - with one united voice - that an attack on family physicians is NOT acceptable and will NOT be tolerated by our profession.

We call on our patients to stand beside us as we fight to ensure that we can continue to offer them the access and comprehensive, patient-centered care they deserve.

We call on Alberta Health, Minister Shandro and Premier Kenney to not destroy the Patient’s Medical Home practices that we have all been working so hard to build.

Do we believe in and fight for a strong primary care system, or do we allow ill-conceived and irresponsible “slash and burn” cuts to meet a relatively arbitrary budget target to burn our [patient’s medical] house to the ground?

Your personal stories and experiences would be most appreciated to give “face” to the damage being proposed by AH. As indicated in today’s President’s Letter, the most effective and efficient way to provide your input on these proposals is to post your comments and view those of your colleagues on each of the proposals (LOG IN REQUIRED). This material will be collated and forwarded to the AMA Compensation Committee for review and presentation to the special RF. As always, you can get in touch with me directly to share your thoughts via sfmpres@albertadoctors.org.

Best regards,

[Signature]

Dr. Kathryn Andrusky  
President, AMA Section of Family Medicine