



November 22, 2023

Dear Section of Family Medicine Members,

RE: SFM statement regarding government announcement on nurse practitioners

The SFM agrees wholeheartedly with government's statement that too many Albertans cannot find family doctors. We do, however, have very serious concerns regarding the messaging that family physicians are in some way replaceable or exchangeable with nurse practitioners. This is quite simply not true.

There is no question that NPs have undergone a significant amount of professional training. However, that training is not the equivalent of medical school. An RN is not an MD. Anyone who is tempted to think so needs only to examine the two curriculums. It is true that NPs have two years of training on top of their RN degree, but that does not change the fundamentals. Nurses are not doctors. NPs are not family physicians.

There is also no question that Alberta is dealing with a crisis of human health resources. However, the fact remains that many family physicians who might have otherwise been available to serve the needs of Albertans in the community, have been forced out of community practice. First by radical and unprecedented changes to family practice billing codes. Then by the incredible pressures of a pandemic and the subsequent sluggish response of a government that might otherwise have ensured that Albertans could continue to access health care from their community family physician. This was all furthered by decades of not prioritizing and investing in the Patient's Medical Home and primary care networks – networks staffed by valued professionals such as NPs, that were designed to meet the complex and changing health needs of our citizens.

Albertans need access to health professionals in the community. Due in large part to a health system that has too long devalued primary care, Albertans can no longer count on access to a family doctor. That is a tragedy. Nurse practitioners will certainly play some role in helping to fill the gap that has been created, and I am grateful for their participation. But all Albertans should be able to access a family physician.

Albertans do not deserve to be misled.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sarah Bates
Acting President
AMA Section of Family Medicine