

Dear Mr Guthrie,

We, the family physicians of Cochrane, write to you, our elected official, as a united voice with urgent concerns about the recent health care proposals. Our letter has been prompted by the recent actions of the provincial government to unilaterally abolish the Province's contract with its medical doctors leading to poorly considered changes to Alberta's health care system.

While we are pleased that your government has (at least temporarily) reversed the changes to complex modifiers, there are many other proposed changes that are still set to take effect on April 1 which will negatively impact primary care. By tearing up our contract, your government has lost the trust of physicians and we are concerned that you will move forward with these changes after the current crisis abates (the recent announcement regarding cancelling radiologists' contract in the midst of this pandemic doesn't instill confidence in this regard). We are asking that you restore this faith by advocating on our behalf to reinstate the entire contract and allowing the AMA to institute cost saving measures at a later date. At this present time, we feel strongly that our time and the AMA's time is best spent focusing on the crisis which has already begun to descend on this province.

We are extremely concerned that the current fee codes available to us during this pandemic are grossly inadequate and do not allow physicians to care for patients safely and adequately. You are often quick to compare our fees to other provinces; at the onset of this pandemic, every other province immediately provided codes for physicians to care for patients remotely without seriously impacting the viability of their office practice. To date, Alberta Health has provided only one code which pays the same amount as it did 11 years ago when it was developed. And they only provided this after extreme pressure and many hours of lobbying, time which would have been much better spent preparing for patient care during this pandemic.

You recently wrote an article published in The Cochrane Times stating that "Many physicians in Alberta are upset with the proposals the Ministry of Health has brought forward to curb expenditures, and particularly with changes in Doctors compensation...Physicians are opposed to changes and are pressuring politicians to reconsider this decision."

We wonder if you have ever stopped to think why so many physicians, not just in Cochrane, but across all of Alberta in multiple specialties, are raising the alarm. When the people who deal with patients, day in and day out, ask you to stop and give pause to really consider the implications of what you are doing, surely there has to be some part of you that wonders why?

These past few months have been exhausting and demoralizing to front line medicine. We are tired. We are preparing to wage a battle for the lives of our patients, our families, and even our own medical community as COVID-19 begins to impact the lives of those we care about. Instead of feeling valued, we have been required by your government to justify the role we play in keeping our patients healthy and preventing illness and chronic disease from impacting their quality of life. We are not starting this battle with a full tank, but we will fight hard because we are passionate about primary care and we love our patients and our vocation.

We share your goals and the goals of government — ensuring that our system is sustainable, while providing the best possible care to all patients across the province. But it must be done in a way that ensures that the safety and quality of patient care is not impacted. We are asking for your support in this.

We urge you take accountability and take the views of those on the front line into consideration. We hope that you continue to work with the AMA in honest and transparent discussions so we can together find a solution to providing a viable health care system for the people of Alberta.

We look forward to working with you.

The Doctors of Cochrane

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Helen Davis-Herdman
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Cc: Health Minister Tyler Shandro
Premier Jason Kenney