



Open Letter to Physicians

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It is our responsibility as clinical leaders, as it is the collective responsibility of all physicians and health care practitioners, to unequivocally address public concerns that our colleagues are restricted in any way from advocating on behalf of their patients.

This is not a political issue up for debate. It is not opinion or commentary.

As physicians and practitioners, it is our duty to our patients, our colleagues and our profession to represent and articulate the needs and best interests of our patients, and the health system as a whole. It is a standard set centuries ago within the Hippocratic Oath and it remains the touchstone for our profession to this day. As such, it is an expectation of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta Code of Conduct, and of the Canadian Medical Association Code of Ethics.

This, an open letter to all Alberta physicians, is our personal commitment to do all in our power to enable every physician in Alberta to meet this standard. As medical leaders, we must intervene, even at the risk of being drawn into the current debate, because we have a higher and greater obligation to our patients. We want to make it clear to our patients and the public that caregivers can and must advocate without hesitation.

Today, we are stating for the record, as per the Alberta Health Services Medical Staff Bylaws & Rules, developed by physicians and practitioners for physicians and practitioners, that medical staff and AHS share joint responsibility and accountability for the provision of health services to Albertans. Furthermore, the AHS Medical Staff Bylaws & Rules describe the behaviour and professionalism expected of individual medical staff members and AHS leaders. Included is an explicit statement confirming the right and responsibility of medical staff members to advocate for their patients.

The Bylaws & Rules also ensure a system of protection that affords due process and procedural safeguards for physicians with respect to their actions and interactions with AHS. In addition, the Bylaws & Rules provide multiple avenues and mechanisms for physicians, and medical staff, to discuss and report patient care issues, and to participate proactively with AHS in improving the health care system.

These words represent more than bylaws in and of themselves. They are founded on a set of principles, and Alberta Health Services will not allow these principles to be undermined. These principles as defined in the AHS Code of Conduct are intended to guide all actions and interactions, and underpin all AHS bylaws, policies, procedures, standards, guidelines, regulations and directives that must be followed by AHS and those who provide services on behalf of AHS. We must work in the best interests of patients and clients, we must exercise our best judgement, we must raise our hands if we see something we think is not best for our patients or our organization, and we must have the courage to stand up for what is right.

The AHS Code of Conduct does not restrict a physician or other practitioner to speak out, quite the opposite. In essence, we are required to bring our concerns forward; we are not merely given permission to do so. The Code sets out a number of options for raising issues including speaking to a manager or a physician leader, speaking to the Ethics and Compliance Officer or by contacting the External Confidential Reporting and Disclosure Service.

Today, we are speaking personally as physicians, and making a commitment as leaders, that we support our physician colleagues in upholding their duty and responsibility to advocate for their patients. This is a commitment that goes beyond any policy and to the heart of the oath made by all of us.

Now, and as we move forward in the weeks and months ahead, we have an opportunity to define the future and to develop a partnership that ultimately benefits our individual patients, and the health system as a whole.

Sincerely,

Dr. Chris Eagle, Acting CEO & President, Alberta Health Services
 Dr. David Megran, EVP and Acting Executive Lead for Quality and Service Improvement
 Dr. Francois Belanger, Acting EVP and Chief Medical Officer