



April 24, 2020

Dear Family Physicians,

Today's funding announcement was unapologetic, self-congratulatory public grandstanding. To be the cause of a calamity and then congratulate yourself on stemming the bleeding would be oddly self-serving for most, but seems unfortunately consistent for this government. There is no plan, there is no system view, there is no understanding, and worst of all there is no listening.

For me, there is only one thing that is clear, the current government approach is solely focused on breaking up the association that has represented you for 114 years. What else does announcing the "preservation" of the MLR program for family physicians while taking over administration of it achieve other than discrediting the AMA? Same with acting as a savior for cancelling the new rural "z" code fiasco they created in rural Alberta and taking over the Rural Remote Northern Program. They also announced the suspension of the "z" codes for urban physicians, what exactly that means moving forward is anyone's guess. Lastly, moving rural sustainability planning under the Provincial Primary Care Network Committee, the terms of which are bound by a Ministerial Order, does nothing other than further consolidate decision making under the Minister himself. I say beware of those who come bearing gifts, especially when those gifts are nothing more than camouflage for the destruction of your profession.

To reform and change physician payment in a complex system is a massive undertaking. Balancing the form payments take, with the right amount of payment for different services, fairness of payment between specialties and fairness for segmented groups within specialties requires a holistic approach. Subtle changes can have unpredictable outcomes and for 114 years the Alberta Medical Association has played a role in trying to promote changes that will have a positive impact on performance and balance out changes that have had an unpredicted negative impact. Make no mistake, today represents a continued attack on the role of our Association.

What we saw today was another example of elected officials with entrenched beliefs take a positioning approach. If you approach an issue with the goal of managing your predetermined position and fail to seek out understanding, you are ill-suited to lead in a complex system. When you exclude subject matter experts, exclude those working in the system and fail to understand the intricate relationships between structure and outcome, you fail in the most fundamental way possible.

The consequences of this narrow approach are dire. The Rural Sustainability Group highlighted some of these consequences in their April 20th press release, which was subsequently reflected in 22 provincial and national articles, garnering much attention on social media and resulting in radio and other media appearances. But this is not a "rural only" issue, and any rural solution created in isolation, without considering the relationships rural family medicine has with urban family medicine, or that rural family medicine has with local or regional specialists, amounts to the rearrangement of deck chairs on the Titanic. Today, deck chairs were rearranged, small concessions were made, but today's announcement has not had the desired effect of placating the Rural Sustainability Group.

We will not be successful if our profession is picked apart. We will not be successful if we pit rural against urban, specialist against generalist, proceduralist vs diagnostician, administrative vs clinical. If

we care only for our personal position, we are no better than those we criticize. Many of you are hurting emotionally and financially, but we must continue to advocate for our rights. We have a right to a negotiated agreement for all, we have a right to arbitration, and anything that is not enshrined in a comprehensive and thoughtfully constructed agreement will create chaos and disruption within our system that we will never recover from.

Best regards,



Dr. Craig Hodgson  
President, AMA Section of Family Medicine

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