

Tuesday, July 8, 2008

Alberta Health Services moves toward one provincial health system to increase patient access and enhance care

(Calgary, Alberta)...Today, Alberta Health Services (AHS), the new provincial system that has accountability for all health delivery, announced a restructuring plan that will create one coordinated, unified operation.

The purpose of the change is to enhance health care and develop an approach that places the patient first regardless of where they live in Alberta.

“We see great opportunities for patients to be even better served in the future with the changes that will occur as part of the restructuring,” says Ken Hughes AHS Board Chair. “The plan is to have one approach to health care that integrates health services across the province and standardizes care so that all patients receive the same quality of care.”

In creating the new provincial health system, several top administrators, CEOs in health regions and boards, are leaving their respective organizations. Hughes acknowledged the role these senior leaders have played in the reputation Alberta has established as a leader in health care.

“These are people who have worked very hard on behalf of Albertans and we recognize and thank them for their dedication and contribution to health service delivery,” he says.

In the new provincial health system, there will be a Continuum of Care Division with two areas: Urban and Rural. As part of the restructuring, an Integration Team of health care providers, planners and administrators and a Council of Clinical Advisors from across the health system will work closely with the Continuum of Care Division to ensure a smooth transition and no disruption of service.

Paddy Meade, former deputy minister, Alberta Health and Wellness, has been appointed to the position of Executive Operating Officer to lead the Continuum of Care Division. Dr. Chris Eagle, former President and Chief Operating Officer from the Calgary Health Region becomes the Chief Operating Officer, Urban. Pam Whitnack, former Chief Executive Officer of the Chinook Health Region, becomes the Chief Operating Officer for the Rural health delivery stream. Andrew Will, former Chief Executive Officer of the Aspen Health Region will also support Whitnack in this area as Senior Operating Officer.

“These four senior people have proven over a long period that they understand the many different aspects of health care and have the ability to motivate and lead a team that can make a difference,” says Hughes.

In addition to the Continuum of Care Division, the second area is Planning and Programs. These are services such as public health, prevention and wellness, and ambulance services that are part of everyday health service delivery, but require a unique focus. For this area, Aslam Bhatti, former Vice-President, Operations with the Alberta Cancer Board has been appointed Interim Chief Operating Officer.

The last areas are Corporate Services (human resources, information technology and other functions) and Finance (finance, capital and procurement). In Corporate Services, Jim Saunders, former CEO of East Central Health becomes Interim Chief Operating Officer.

And in the Financial Services area, Kay Best, former Executive Vice President, Risk Management and Chief Financial Officer with the Calgary Health Region, becomes Interim Chief Financial Officer.

During the restructuring changes, patients will continue to access health care in the same way without any disruption in services.

Hughes stressed the role of health care providers in making the new system work effectively. "Certainly we need all the clinical people we can get...we currently have a shortage of available nurses and other professional health groups and that won't change with the new AHS," he says. "Recruiting and retaining top health care professionals will be a priority for the AHS."

Over the next several weeks, AHS plans to meet with key public groups and individuals with a keen interest in Alberta's health system to explain the overall restructuring initiatives. Plans are also in place starting today to meet with staff throughout all health regions and boards to outline the changes and encourage their input and suggestions for improving the system.

A video of Hughes' message to all Albertans can be viewed at www.albertahealthservices.ca.

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Alberta Health Services

