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AHS continues to put patients first with new strategy

CALGARY – Patients and families must be welcomed partners within their health care teams, and be engaged in improving and managing their own health and wellness, according to an Alberta Health Services (AHS) strategy paper, released today.

The Patient First Strategy, developed following consultations with Albertans, identifies priority actions needed to further embed the principles of patient- and family-centred care in a consistent and standardized way throughout the organization.

“Patient- and family-centred care is about putting the experiences, priorities and trust of patients and families first,” said Vickie Kaminski, AHS President and CEO at a press conference at the South Health Campus. “There are already many examples of excellent patient- and family-centred care practices across AHS and our partner health care organizations. With the Patient First Strategy, AHS is taking another step toward establishing a culture of compassion, caring and collaboration, and ensuring that this occurs in every AHS health care encounter.”

Sarah Hoffman, Minister of Health, said the Patient First Strategy represents a respectful and responsive approach to health care delivery.

“I’m pleased to see AHS’ commitment to partnering with patients and families to ensure that they are involved in their own care using a team-based approach,” said Minister Hoffman. “Albertans have a vested interest in their health and their health system. Their voices need to be better heard and respected in order for the health system to truly meet all of their physical and emotional needs.”

Priority actions outlined in the strategy will:

- Empower patients and families to be active members of their health care teams by encouraging them to ask questions and raise concerns, and while respecting patient and family values, needs and preferences.
- Improve communications at all levels to ensure that care plans are fully understood by all parties and that pertinent patient information is shared among all members of the care team.
- Further enhance a team-based approach to care that provides patients and families comprehensive and seamless health care experiences.
- Improve co-ordination and continuity of care when patients move between units or facilities.

“Research shows that a patient- and family-centred approach to care reduces the length of time patients spend in hospital, improve patient experiences, and lead to better patient outcomes,” said Deb Runnalls, co-chair of the Patient First Steering Committee. “The Patient First Strategy outlines how AHS can provide the best care possible to every patient who comes to our facilities.”

Patients and their families; AHS staff and physicians; and AHS health care partners and stakeholder groups — including the Aboriginal Wisdom Council, Health Advisory Councils, the Children and Youth Advisory Council, and Strategic Clinical Networks — provided input into the Patient First Strategy through formal and informal feedback sessions and surveys.

An implementation plan is underway with further engagement of patients and their families as the Patient First Strategy is adopted throughout AHS. An already-established implementation steering committee will support and guide patient and family-centred care across all AHS zones and programs.

Kaminski pointed out that there are many AHS facilities who have fully embraced the principles of patient- and family-centred care. For instance, at the South Health Campus in Calgary, staff and physicians introduce themselves by NOD: an acronym for staff to use so when they meet patients by introducing themselves with their **N**ame, **O**ccupation, and their **D**uty. The site has also eliminated visiting hours where family and friends are welcome to stay overnight on most inpatient units to provide comfort and support to patients. And a Citizen Advisory Team brings the perspective and voice of patients, family and communities in the planning, operations, and evaluation of programs, services and facilities.

Last year, the South Health Campus was one of 12 North American hospitals — and the only one in Canada — selected by the U.S.-based Institute for Patient- and Family-Centered Care as an exemplar health facility for use of best practices in Patient and Family Centered Care.

“The South Health Campus represents a new way of engaging with patients, families and the surrounding community,” said Kaminski. “The facility began its phased opening 2012 and, right from the start, it was clear this is a place where patients and families come first.” Patients and families were present at the initial inception of the facility and have been active partners in all the planning phases of the hospital infrastructure and programmatic developments.

The Patient First Strategy is one of four AHS strategies aimed at improving the health system. AHS is also finalizing strategies to promote collaborative care and stable, predictable staffing; support research and innovation to improve patient outcomes; and develop systems so AHS staff, physicians and leaders have the information and data they need at their fingertips.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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