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**PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
ALBERTA HEALTH SERVICES**

**OPENING REMARKS TO
MEETING OF CENTRAL ALBERTA MAYORS AND REEVES**

**3RD FLOOR BOARDROOM
SOUTH COMPLEX
RED DEER HOSPITAL**

**FRIDAY, JUNE 12, 2009
2:00 PM**

INTRODUCTION

- **Hello everyone, and thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you about Alberta Health Services' vision for health care in rural Alberta.**
- **It's important for us to engage each other to ensure the health care requirements of rural Albertans are clearly laid out, and I want to commend you all for your commitment to bringing the needs of your respective communities forward.**
- **I would also like to acknowledge Gord Bontje, a member of the Board of Alberta Health Services and a resident of Red Deer.**
- **I imagine you have come prepared with many questions, but I would prefer that you wait until the end of my speech to ask them. I'll be happy to answer your questions at that time.**

WORK TO DATE

- **I would like to begin by discussing some of the work we have done in recent weeks.**
- **As you are well-aware, the past thirteen months since the so called "super board" was formed have seen a lot of changes within our health system as we continue to develop and refine our provincial structure.**
- **The amount of work involved in bringing together the staff, physicians, volunteers, health delivery partners, programs and services from across the province has been, and continues to be, a monumental task**

- **But when we step back and look at our goal, it becomes clear that goal is manageable—and can be achieved. Our mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans. Our mandate is to ensure that quality health supports and services are coordinated across the province – both in rural and urban areas.**
- **We took a large step towards that goal recently, with the implementation of our new organizational structure on June 1. This is a foundational step for drawing like functions together, launching a new culture of engagement for Alberta Health Services.**
- **As far as Central Alberta is concerned, there are three key people in that structure: Kerry Bales, the VP for the Central Zone, Carol Murray the VP for the Red Deer Hospital and the third key person is the zone Medical Director. We expect to be making an announcement about that person soon.**
- **Carol's role is obvious: The hospital. As it turns out, Kerry, a Central Alberta boy born and bred, has an obvious role too: he is responsible for more or less everything else that Alberta Health Services does here. Not quite true though as there are some central functions such as pharmacy, but either Carol or Kerry can manage any concerns you have with us.**

RURAL HEALTH CARE

- **There has been a lot of gossip and misinformation spread about our plans for rural communities, including Central Alberta, over the last few months. This is really**

unfortunate as it causes needless concern and distress both in the communities named and amongst our staff.

- **Let me be quite clear, Alberta Health Services recognizes the key role that our health services play in small rural communities.**
- **To ensure rural communities receive quality, accessible and sustainable health care, we will develop a comprehensive rural and community health planning strategy. That will be our framework for how we, through the zones, will engage with each rural community.**
- **It is vital for communities to play an active role in the development of the health care system. To that end, this strategy will include a mechanism to engage and involve communities in recommendations around health services delivery in their local communities throughout rural Alberta.**
- **Alberta Health Services values engagement and we will put that into practice in the way in which we work with you and other rural communities.**
- **As we move to think about how we will effectively reposition health services in rural communities, we need to ensure that communities, physicians and elected officials come together to ensure a sustainable approach. We are seeing an example of this coming together today.**
- **I know many of you are here to discuss the possibility of rural hospitals and other health care facilities being closed or downgraded due to a number of reasons – including budgetary concerns.**

- **We have three main goals: Access, Quality and Sustainability. All are important, not just one.**
- **Any decision regarding health facilities will take a number of factors into consideration, including long-term sustainability of services, our ability to continue to provide essential quality and accessible health care, and yes, finances.**
- **The simple fact is that we don't have the necessary resources, either financial or human, to provide every type of health service in each small community you know that. You know you can't have a heart transplant unit on every corner. To attempt to provide every service everywhere would in the end, result in that level of service being unsustainable and not provide the quality of care you and I both want and need..**
- **But how will we ensure we do provide access and quality? The simple answer is that we will work with you to do that. Give you the data we have, listen to your concerns and issues.**
- **As part of our rural and community health planning strategy, we will identify the type and volume of health care services to be provided in each community.**
- **To facilitate this process, we will develop and then implement a standardized method to gather information about health service usage in rural communities across the province, how to describe services and what other services are needed to make them safe and sustainable. We will examine what types of services are being used, how often those services are used, and so on.**

- **Once that step is complete, we will take that information and use it to plan for effective and sustainable health service delivery in communities across Alberta. We will do this with you. I repeat, you will be involved in that planning.**
- **Rest assured, any decisions about the future mix and type of services provided will be based on standards for quality and safety of services, and what support services need to be in place to ensure we meet those standards. We are committed to ensuring each community has the volume of services necessary to ensure safety.**
- **What is the timeline for all of this? Well it's a big task and so will take a few years. In some communities slower, in some faster. We aren't working here to any particular timeline. We want to get it right, not quick and engaging with the communities takes time.**
- **Managing staff is another aspect of our strategy. To maximize efficiency, we will need to address staffing mix in each facility, ensuring that staff are working to full scope of practice, and that we have the right type of health care providers in place to meet patient needs. As an example, we won't have an excess of continuing care staff in a community with a youthful population.**
- **Staff retention is an equally important matter. Alberta, and rural communities in particular, need to ensure they are "growing their own" LPNs and Health Care Aides from within, and that they are provided opportunities to upgrade their education and skills as appropriate. This will be key in retaining the staff necessary to provide quality health services. In turn, the LPNs can grow and develop into RNs. We want to ensure that we have people providing care in our communities who know and love those communities. We in turn need to help our staff develop their skills to meet the needs of those communities.**

- **To provide the greatest range of services possible, we should also explore using other types of healthcare providers in rural communities. Enhanced use of EMS in our Emergency Departments for example, or making more use of the skills of Alberta’s physician assistants and nurse practitioners. At any rate, ensuring the right skill mix for the range of services is a critical issue we need to address.**
- **So, what in a nutshell does this mean for Central Alberta. First, we have no plans to close, downgrade, repurpose or any other verb you want, any small hospital in any town. Period. Any documents that might have been produced in the past of whatever provenance are not the policy of Alberta Health Services.**
- **Second, on a go forward basis, we want to work with you to identify what services we can and should provide in the future which are accessible, of high quality and sustainable. Remember our mission statement *To provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans*. That doesn’t only apply in Edmonton and Calgary but in every corner of the province.**
- **Thirdly, I ask you to commit to work with us, on a basis of realism, to help us implement our mission in your community. These same commitments apply across all of Alberta, not just here.**

CONCLUSION

- **Access, quality and sustainability are challenges facing health systems across Canada and around the world. We ask that communities, healthcare providers, physicians and other key stakeholders join with us in meeting these challenges and developing a unique Alberta approach to**

provide health services using the ingenuity for which Alberta is renowned.

- **As Alberta Health Services works to further the integration of systems and best practices across Alberta, we will build on this province's history of success and innovation in health and look to all of you to help continue that success.**
- **On that note, I would now like to open the floor to your questions. END**