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**THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGEMENT IN HEALTH SERVICE DELIVERY
PRESENTED TO THE ALBERTA FEDERATION OF REGULATED HEALTH
PROFESSIONALS**

**ROYAL GLENORA CLUB
11160 RIVER VALLEY ROAD
EDMONTON, ALBERTA**

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2009
1:00 P.M. to 2:00 P.M.**

- **Hello everyone, and thank you for inviting me to speak with you this afternoon. It is my pleasure to be here today to discuss the structure and services provided by Alberta Health Services.**
- **This goes without saying, but it is essential that Alberta Health Services engage in frequent communication with all our stakeholders – including everyone in attendance today. One of my top priorities is to keep Albertans up-to-date regarding our plan for the health-care system.**
- **Now that I've been in my role as President and CEO of Alberta Services for over half a year, I've had the opportunity to meet with various health-care stakeholders: foundations, community groups, community leaders, frontline staff, and professional organizations such as the Alberta Federation of Regulated Health Professionals.**
- **It's important for me to get out and meet with groups like yours to let you know what Alberta Health Services is doing and planning, and to make sure you have the information you need to be involved in the health care transformation currently underway in Alberta.**
- **My goal for today is to leave you with a better understanding of the structure and services offered by Alberta Health Services, including some of the work we're doing in rural communities and the creation of Clinician Council and Clinical Networks.**
- **I also want to have a sense of both the magnitude of the task before us and the opportunity we have to enhance Alberta's reputation as an international leader in health innovation – and the important role engagement plays in**

this process.

- **Health care is very much a complicated subject, so it stands to reason everyone here has a lot of questions for me. I'll be happy to answer your questions a little later.**
- **Now as you know, over a year ago the Minister of Health and Wellness, Ron Liepert, announced the reorganization of the health care system – the merger of 12 health entities into what we know today as Alberta Health Services.**
- **A great deal of work has taken place in the transformation of Alberta's health system, important structural and largely administrative work necessary to prepare an organization of 90,000 people for the greater part of the challenge still before us.**
- **In the time since Minister Liepert's announcement last year, we have adopted a new governance model, appointed key leaders and developed a clear, streamlined organizational structure and the strategic direction that will guide our work for the next three years.**
- **One focus of my first three months was the development of Alberta Health Services' Strategic Direction including the articulation of our core values: Respect, Accountability, Transparency and Engagement.**
- **In creating a new organization, we are also creating a new culture – a different way of thinking and planning, a culture driven not by chance and circumstance, not by playing games and running to the provincial government to fix our problems, but purposefully guided by a set of principles – the core values I articulated earlier - that put the needs of**

our patients first.

- **Earlier I also mentioned the development of a clear, streamlined organizational structure. This structure supports our vision of patient-focused quality care that is accessible and sustainable.**
- **It is based on four principles: clear and unambiguous line accountability; flattening of the organization; integration of services and units as close as possible to the front line; and a direct link to strategy and implementation at the Executive level.**
- **Our structure matches accountability with responsibility, and ensure decision making includes collaboration and engagement with others. This creates more opportunities for improvement, optimization, innovation and efficiency throughout the organization.**
- **And while we make such fundamental changes to the health system, we need to ensure the whole operation continues to run smoothly. That we can continue to provide the quality health care Albertans deserve.**
- **What does that involve?**
- **102 acute care hospitals, with 6,800 beds, receiving 1.9 million emergency department visits per year, performing 247,000 surgeries and delivering 50,000 babies.**
- **That's over 80 community health centers, delivering hundreds of thousands of immunizations; nurses taking 900,000 calls at HealthLink; and home health-care workers**

spending 10 million hours in the homes of people needing support to recover from illness or injury, or to be able to live as independently as possible.

- **It is a huge job, to be sure. Thankfully we have the single most important element of success: 90,000 dedicated staff and physicians, along with over 18,000 volunteers across this province and who keep the system operating under incredible pressure.**
- **As an organization, we are committed to striking a better balance of community and hospital-based care.**
- **This coordinated strategy would never have been possible without the integration and engagement between Edmonton and Calgary, and rural and urban, that is emerging in our new organization.**
- **Our integration teams and new, consolidated program areas are doing absolutely critical work that will improve patient care and streamline our back-shop processes.**
- **We are not simply an amalgamation of former regions, we are a fundamentally different organization, facing fundamentally different challenges in our field – H1N1 immediately comes to mind – and we are compelled to rethink what we do and how we do it.**
- **I mentioned how our organizational structure creates more opportunities for improvement, optimization, innovation and efficiency throughout the organization. We are seeing an example of this as we respond to the H1N1 pandemic.**

- **Formerly, health authorities in Alberta had specialized teams planning for emergency preparedness, including a pandemic response, within their local jurisdictions. After Alberta Health Services merged these health authorities into one provincial health system, we gained a significant advantage.**
- **Those teams, with input from Alberta Health and Wellness, have worked together to share their plans, expertise and learning to build one provincially co-ordinated plan – our Pandemic Response Plan – that is responsive across the province.**
- **In fact, our senior leaders, managers and frontline staff from across the province have been working to plan for the increased demand the pandemic will have on our health care system since we saw the first H1N1 cases this past spring.**
- **The Pandemic Response Plan – officially known as the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Response Plan – was released on October 1, 2009, and is now being implemented and used on the frontlines.**
- **This will allow us to respond effectively to the pandemic while maintaining – as much as possible, and for as long as possible – regular day-to-day operations of our health care system.**
- **As one health authority, we have the ability to share information with our health-care providers like never before. We can provide them with the information they need far more quickly, making sure they are fully prepared**

to deal with all eventualities relating to the pandemic and give Albertans the best care possible.

- During this pandemic, our staff and physicians may be called upon to undertake additional duties related to our pandemic response. In some instances, they may be asked to dedicate full-time efforts to this response, and their regular duties will be reassigned or temporarily suspended.
- Our ability to manage the challenges created by the pandemic relies on the skills and dedication of all our health-care professionals. To ensure their well-being, we are committed to providing a safe work environment and providing them with the tools necessary to protect themselves and their patients from exposure to influenza. This includes providing our staff and physicians with seasonal and H1N1 vaccinations.
- By operating on a provincial level, we can also better manage the clinics across the province that began to immunize all Albertans over six months of age against H1N1 earlier today. You can find detailed information on locations and times of H1N1 influenza immunization clinics on our website: www.albertahealthservices.ca
- As it stands today, the second wave of H1N1 has arrived in Alberta. We are now seeing more influenza in our schools, hospitals, and Emergency Departments. As a result, Alberta Health Services has moved from a *planning* to a *response* mode. In fact, we are now in our second Activation Level, which we refer to as the “Initiation / Surge” phase.

- **We will continue to keep Albertans informed of the status of the pandemic, and how we are responding to it. As a reminder, you can find a great deal of H1N1 information on our website, including our pandemic plan.**
- **This pandemic may very well be the greatest clinical challenge our young organization has faced to date. I am confident we will meet that challenge, learn from it, and come through it a better organization.**
- **Even though our primary focus right now is pandemic planning, we are not stopping our work in other areas. In fact, we have made significant progress in many areas, including engaging various stakeholder groups to improve the quality, accessibility and sustainability of health care for Albertans.**
- **As we are building a system that is focused on the needs of Albertans, we recognize public feedback and engagement is absolutely a priority. If we want to meet the needs of the public, we need to have them fully involved.**
- **The development of the Community Engagement Portfolio indicates our commitment to this priority. This portfolio is responsible for supporting the operations of Foundations, Trust, and the Health Advisory Councils.**
- **Enhancing the relationships between all parties will help us reach our goals of quality, access and sustainability – along with our commitment to be transparent to the public.**
- **To ensure these relationships remain viable, the Community Engagement Team of Alberta Health Services will:**

- **Seek ways to continually strengthen the relationships between Alberta Health Services and Foundations,**
 - **Ensure Foundations are aware of the goals and strategies of Alberta Health Services so they may align fund-raising initiatives and maximize success in health service provision, and**
 - **Work in collaboration with local staff and community leaders to establish Community Engagement as a resource for Alberta Health Services operational leaders and Foundations so that they may excel as fundraisers and stewards of community donations.**
- **Another key relationship we seek to build on is our relationship with rural communities. It is vital that all communities, both urban and rural, are engaged in the continued development of our health-care system.**
 - **We are committed to providing rural communities with quality, accessible and sustainable health care. To ensure this, we're developing a comprehensive rural and community health planning strategy.**
 - **This strategy will include a framework that supports and outlines consistent processes for decision making and providing quality, safe care.**
 - **Alberta Health Services is working diligently and quickly to ensure the right care is delivered in the right place at the right time to all Albertans, including those who live in rural and remote areas.**
 - **We know that no two rural communities are alike; each one has its own set of needs. Accordingly, we can not**

approach the provision of health services with a one-size-fits-all attitude because that won't allow us to best meet the needs of Albertans and the unique communities they live in.

- **But what we do need is a consistent approach to how we make those decisions.**
- **We want our decision making to be based on evidence, including demographics and population health data, that will give us understanding as to what services are truly needed in a community.**
- **And we need to work with communities to determine if the data we're using is giving us the full picture or if there's something we're missing as we work to determine the right mix of services for their areas. Above all, we are committed to ensuring each community has the volume of services necessary to ensure safety.**
- **Even so, it will never make sense for us to offer every service in every community. If we attempted to provide every type of service everywhere this would quickly prove unsustainable and definitely not provide the quality of care we all want and need.**
- **We simply don't have the financial or human resources to provide all services to all communities, and in some cases we'd be offering services no one would make use of.**
- **As we make decisions about health service delivery in rural Alberta, we also need to take geography and proximity into account. When communities are close**

together we can take advantage of their proximity to share services and service providers.

- **We want communities to be engaged with us as we determine which services are housed where. We also want communities to be engaged with each other in this discussion. As I said before, it will never make sense to offer every service everywhere.**
- **But when we look at general service areas, communities working together and working with us can play a role in determining what might go where to best meet the needs of local residents.**
- **There are tough decisions before us to be made, and we need to make them now or they will get even tougher. I've promised that Alberta Health Services will involve communities in the planning of future health service delivery in their areas and I'm sticking to this promise.**
- **In addition to engaging with the public, Alberta Health Services is establishing meaningful opportunities for engagement and open communication with Clinicians from all health professions – from physicians to nurses to pharmacists – everyone. To accomplish this, we are implementing a clinical engagement framework.**
- **This framework has been developed to ensure the expertise and experience of physicians, nurses and allied health professionals will inform patient and population issues, improve clinical practice, patient outcomes, quality and patient safety, and strategic planning.**

- **It is composed of two parts; an Alberta Clinician Council and several Clinical Networks.**

- **The Alberta Clinician Council is a multidisciplinary forum that addresses issues of quality, access and patient safety. It will have direct access to the Senior Executive of Alberta Health Services and will advise on significant clinical strategic issues and organizational priorities.**

- **The Alberta Clinician Council focuses on three main areas of responsibility:**
 - **Advise on quality and patient safety issues and provide input on major safety recommendations,**
 - **Advise on significant clinical strategic issues, organizational priorities and new opportunities, and,**
 - **Oversee the development and progress of the Clinical Networks.**

- **Clinical Networks are “on the ground” working groups that will be diving deep into evidence-based, targeted work, developing service models and clinical pathways, and seeking out leading practices and ensuring those practices are applied consistently across the province.**

- **Each Network will engage clinicians, patients and other support departments in decision-making about clinical services planning and implementation, clinical practice improvement, quality and patient safety.**

- **Improvements in health care delivery, enhanced patient experience and better outcomes can only be produced with the involvement of our clinicians. I look forward to seeing**

the work these groups will accomplish in the coming months.

- **And of course, we need to engage groups like Alberta Federation of Regulated Health Professions and Alberta's health regulatory colleges.**

- **Our goals are the same as yours – the safety and well-being of Albertans is our overriding focus and is the underlying theme in everything we do.**

- **Helping to ensure Alberta's regulated health professionals practice and conduct themselves according to defined standards is critical in protecting and promoting the health of Albertans.**

- **Because of the health regulatory colleges, Albertans can be confident their health professionals:**
 - **Meet mandatory licensing and registration standards and pass standardized national and provincial qualifying exams,**

 - **Follow defined practice, conduct and ethical standards,**

 - **Renew their license to practice annually,**

 - **Participate in a mandatory continuing competence program, and**

 - **Are held accountable for their professional conduct and practice by their respective college.**

- **By holding our health professionals to such a high standard, Albertans will know they are receiving the best in care. This work also enhances Alberta Health Services' reputation as being one of the leading health systems in the country.**
- **We want to engage and work with you so we can better work together to improve the health and wellbeing of Albertans. As you represent the bodies that implement, administer and enforce health care legislation relating to health care professionals, we need to find opportunities where we can connect.**
- **I also ask that you continue the outstanding work you have been doing over the years. It is your support that helps our doctors, nurses and all other health-care professionals provide the best possible care to all Albertans. Your contributions are essential to the success of the health-care system.**
- **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.**
- **I know that working together with all our partners stakeholders, we can build a health care system that addresses the needs of all Albertans.**
- **To close, I would like to thank you for your attention and for inviting me to speak today. I now welcome any questions you may have.**
- **Thank you.**