

To our valued community,

We understand there has been a lot of confusion about what is happening with healthcare in Pincher Creek. We hope to provide some clarity in this letter from our physician group, which has the support of your town and MD councillors.

Our situation is precarious. On April 24th, the government walked back some of its changes to physician funding that made comprehensive rural practices like ours financially unsustainable. This was a stop-gap measure meant to pacify rural MLAs who were receiving pressure from strong community voices like ours. The underlying issue remains, because without an agreement government can continue to make unilateral changes without physician or community input. As you know from our town hall, physicians warned six months ago that these proposals were harmful, and suggested alternative ways to achieve the required savings. Instead of listening to health care experts or concerned citizens, the government pushed their changes through during a pandemic, causing an entirely avoidable crisis that will have lasting damage.

Health care is not a field where a “trial and error” approach should be acceptable. Right now, Albertan physicians are without an agreement and at the whim of a minister who has shown no willingness to listen to those who are directly affected by his decisions. As a result of this uncertainty, medical students and residents across the province have voiced their concerns about staying in Alberta. Physicians are portable, and there is no reason to expect them to want to stay in an environment that provides zero security. We have personally lost one of two recruits who planned to join us this summer, and are in danger of losing the other if we do not achieve some sort of stability.

We tell you this because we want you to understand why our decision to withdraw hospital services July 31st has not changed. The reversal of some of government's harmful impositions on April 24th means nothing when everything can be upended again next week. We have put a lot of effort into making sure we can continue to care for you as best as possible through our clinic after July 31st. As you can imagine, a shift of this magnitude requires a lot of retraining for our staff and patients (not to mention us). Until there is an agreement that both parties are beholden to we plan to continue our current course rather than completely uphauling our system every time the government imposes new changes.

That said, Alberta Health (government) has promised both that no rural hospitals will close and that replacement physicians are available to cover services in communities like ours. We hope that you hold them accountable for these promises (as we will be). We intend to work with AHS and any covering physicians to ensure your care continues to be as seamless as possible despite our absence from the hospital side. Again, we will still be here to care for you in our clinic and you can expect increased access to your own physician after hours once we transition. More details on this process will follow once the current COVID-19 crisis has passed.

Even though it is not our responsibility to cover the hospital, we find it incredibly rewarding to be the ones to provide those services when our patients need them. We are still fighting to keep our system as-is, but this government has left physicians without a voice. Please know that your Town and MD Councils are advocating strongly for your healthcare through their respective channels. We are in this together as a community and appreciate your understanding and continued engagement. If you wish to help, please consider writing or calling our MLA Roger Reid, Minister Shandro, and Premier Kenney.

In your service,

Your Pincher Creek physicians