

November 23, 2010

Barb Williamson
Letters Editor
Edmonton Journal
10006 101 Street
Edmonton, AB T5J 0S1

Dear Editor,

Albertans are right to be concerned about the current state of healthcare in the province. In fact the healthcare crisis we are witnessing today is largely the outcome of lack of planning and execution of long-term care (LTC) capacity in Calgary and Edmonton over the past five years.

Over 60 percent of Albertans over the age of 65 reside in Calgary and Edmonton. Today one of the main reasons for the Emergency Room (ER) waiting time crisis is the fact that over 500 acute care beds in Calgary and Edmonton hospitals are occupied by seniors assessed and waiting to be transferred into long term care beds in the community. These are seniors whose needs cannot safely be met by discharging them home or to lower level care facilities.

We regularly hear that thousands of continuing care spaces have been built in the province over the past few years. This is true, but over 75 percent of those beds are for seniors requiring a lower level of care, and the majority have been built in communities outside Calgary and Edmonton. In 2005 the Calgary Health Region projected a need for 200 new LTC beds every year, yet less than 400 beds have been added – significantly fewer than the 1000 beds needed.

The simple fact is that we are not building beds that provide the right level of care for seniors in Calgary and Edmonton, where the need has been greatest for the past five years. Dr Hasmukh Patel, President of the Alberta Continuing Care Association (ACCA) says “One of the keys to solving our ER Crisis is for Alberta Health Services and the Government to commit to opening new LTC beds in Calgary and Edmonton within eighteen months. This can be best accomplished by working with existing industry providers and with the municipalities of Calgary and Edmonton to fast track the permit process to bring on additional capacity in record time. We are in a crisis and we need crisis management”

ACCA represents owners and operators of LTC and supportive living facilities and providers of home care and home support services in the province. We are aware of the challenges of the continuing care system and we are committed to working as partners with Government and Alberta Health Services to find effective solutions.

Bruce West
Executive Director
Alberta Continuing Care Association

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cc: Jodie Sinnema (Health)