

## ***A Healthy Approach***

July 23, 2008

## **New patient navigators improve access to cardiac care**

### ***Provincial initiative better supports Albertans with heart disease***

*Edmonton* ... Albertans with heart disease will receive care more quickly with the assistance of patient navigators – health professional staff who ensure patients are referred to the first available and most appropriate health service provider.

“An individual’s health care should not be compromised by where they live or their awareness of the services available,” said Health and Wellness Minister Ron Liepert. “Through this collaborative initiative, government is taking another step to help Albertans with heart disease obtain timely treatment, a comprehensive range of services and ongoing care. Our new patient navigators play a key role by helping patients obtain the right services at the right time, and closer to home. In fact, patient navigators will be an integral part of our new health delivery system.”

Recruiting, training and establishing the province-wide cardiac patient navigator network is the work of the Alberta Cardiac Care Access Collaborative, begun in 2007 with two-year funding of \$11.8 million provided by the Alberta government. This team is working across the province to provide more effective and efficient health services to cardiac patients. A number of improvements to cardiac care have already been made through this initiative

- Patient navigators, who support and assist physicians and other health care providers, have been established in many areas of the province. The patient navigator helps to coordinate the patient’s services, serves as a liaison with other health care providers, provides referrals, and offers advocacy and ongoing support.
- Patients are referred to the first available and most appropriate cardiac service provider, reducing wait times.
- The Calgary region has established a toll-free telephone line for urgent cardiac referrals by health professionals and the Edmonton region has established a telephone line for non-urgent referrals. This regional collaboration will help to ensure more equitable access for patients throughout the province, and sharing of leading practices between professionals.
- Heart failure clinics have opened in Wainwright, Camrose, Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie, and a new clinic is under development in Medicine Hat. Existing clinics in Lethbridge, Red Deer, Calgary and Edmonton are being enhanced.
- An arrhythmia clinic has opened in the Calgary region, and the Edmonton region is expanding its arrhythmia services.

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- An urgent care model for heart attack patients has been introduced. By improving access to reperfusion (“clot-busting” drugs or angioplasty), a patient’s outcome is improved. Long-term complications, the need for ongoing specialist care and length of hospital stay are reduced.

“This initiative is ensuring that Albertans receive comparable care, regardless of where they live, and that the care they are provided is complete yet specific to their needs,” said Ken Hughes, Chair, Alberta Health Services Board. “The patient navigator’s role is critical. Because of its effectiveness, the navigator concept is being adopted in several areas of care so that Albertans with other serious health concerns receive this assistance as well.”

Cardiovascular disease accounts for the death of more Canadians than any other disease. Every seven minutes, someone in Canada dies from heart disease or stroke and eight in 10 Canadians have at least one risk factor (smoking, alcohol, physical inactivity, obesity, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes).

**Backgrounder: Details on the patient navigator are attached**

**Media inquiries may be directed to:**

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## **Patient navigation system**

The Alberta government is establishing a patient navigation system across Alberta. Patient navigators help physicians and other health care providers to manage the care of patients with complex needs. This includes patients who require services from multiple health professionals and agencies in a variety of service settings, or who may need services provided in different locations across the province or by different government departments.

Patient navigation is centred on the needs of the patient and family. Through the assistance of a navigator (case manager), the physician can link to services across the health care system. The navigator provides access to care, and identifies and monitors resources required by the patient.

### **System development**

The system is being developed in two phases. During the first phase, more than 500 health care providers and administrators from across Alberta attended information sessions about McMaster University's model of case management. Patient navigators are currently working in other areas of care, such as oncology.

The second phase includes creating a provincial policy and continuing to implement the patient navigation system province-wide. Phase two will be complete by 2009.

### **Benefits of patient navigation**

The patient navigation system is built around case-management. The system ensures that patients are accessing the appropriate services and, as a result, frees up other medical services for Albertans. The patient will know who to call in case of an emergency and will be informed of where to go for care. This approach will prevent re-admittance and limit unnecessary emergency room visits.

### **Responsibilities of a patient navigator**

Responsibilities of a patient navigator include assessment, service coordination, referral of clients to services, navigating clients from one service to another, ensuring there are no gaps to services, evaluation of outcomes of services and preparing discharge and transition planning.

Additional information on the Alberta Cardiac Care Access Collaborative can be found at [www.health.alberta.ca](http://www.health.alberta.ca).

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