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Spring Newsletter -2016

An Era of Change

The Ministry of Health is about to transform health care, particularly primary care using the misnomer, Patients First. You should be aware that this Government has slashed fees for physicians' services and under austerity measures, continues to underfund services for patients, ignoring Ontario's rapidly increasing population and needs for an aging population. Managing patients with multiple chronic diseases is both difficult and expensive. Under health care transformation, funding for services will soon flow through the LHINs (Local Health Integration Networks) www.lhins.on.ca. The province is divided into 14 LHINs based on geographic boundaries. Each LHIN is further subdivided into multiple sub-LHINS. The local community services will be facilitated through the LHINs. As you can see, a great deal of administration is required to manage such a system even before there is any funding for patient services (that includes physician services, hospital care, home care etc.) Since the government is already insufficiently funding the system, since they have no money (Ontario has a huge debt, in part due to billions squandered in scandals), we have a situation of health care rationing. Hospitals around the province are closing beds and services in order to achieve their budgetary requirements. Patients who are healthy and not requiring services will not notice anything. Patients who require services will encounter difficulties as programs are cut. For example, hospitals have fixed funding for elective surgical procedures such as knee replacements. There are many jurisdictions in the province where surgeons are not able to operate on their patients because the hospitals have used up their quotas. As a result, patients are required to wait many months or more, in pain, while waiting for necessary surgery. This IS rationed health care. It will not improve under the new system simply because there will never be enough resources. Many nurses have lost their jobs because hospitals do not have the funding to support them.

As you may or may not be aware, Ontario physicians have been without a contract with the Government for over two years. The Government has unilaterally cut fees for the services provided in addition to a global cap for medical services by physicians. There are many clinics that have already closed down (eg chemical dependency clinics). There are dramatic restrictions on new graduates. In essence, Ontario has become a difficult environment for both physicians and patients with no end in sight.

Dr. Pirvu and I continue to invest in our office health care technology at our expense. The Ministry of Health terminated IT support one year ago. We have now upgraded our Electronic Medical Record to a secure cloud based version, called Indivicare, and it will soon allow us to access Hospital Report Manager, a system that deposits

hospital reports immediately into our system, without waiting for faxes or mailed reports. This will improve timely flow of information. We will continue to invest in systems that will be of benefit for everyone. I do not currently have the ability to provide a “patient portal” to your health records online. However, we introduced a practice website that provides information about the practice and allows secure email communication. We will also be introducing online scheduling of appointments in real time. When an integrated system is available for these services, we will provide it.

Please remember, your elected representatives need to hear from you. If you are concerned about the future or if you have been impacted by the cuts, it is important that you contact your MPP, the Minister of Health (Dr. Eric Hoskins) and the Premier (Kathleen Wynne). The next election is over two years away. Please let them know now. Don't wait for the election.

Preventive Screening Test Update

Cancer Care Ontario is involved in identifying my patients who are due for cancer prevention testing. This includes colorectal cancer, cervical cancer and breast cancer. If you are a rostered patient of mine, you may receive a letter in the mail sent on my behalf by Cancer Care Ontario indicating which tests are due. Please contact my office to arrange the appropriate testing when you receive a letter. Call as soon as you receive it because it is easy to forget.

Humber River Hospital

On October 18, 2015, the new Humber River Wilson site opened, replacing the legacy sites (Finch, Church and Keele). This represents about fifteen years of planning. It is a beautiful and very large facility and well positioned to provide services for the future (should there be funding). The emergency department has been seeing significantly more patients than projected and the Finch Site urgent care centre is dramatically underutilized and could face closure. The hospital is working on optimizing patient flow through the emergency department. Please remember that emergency departments are for emergencies and should not be utilized for minor ailments or convenience.

I continue to be actively involved with the hospital as Family Practice Division Chief for Mental Health. My team is responsible for providing the medical care on the mental health inpatient unit on the 5th floor. It is a very busy unit with many complex needs for the patients. Humber River receives patient transfers from other regions in Ontario especially on the child and adolescent unit. I am also proud to support the hospital financially and my gift to the hospital has resulted in the naming of the Group Room on the 5-West mental health unit, in my honor.

After Hours Services and Office Coverage

This is a reminder that in my absence, my office partner, Dr. Adriana Pirvu is available to address urgent medical problems. Additionally, our 35 physician group is available to provide after hours services between 5 to 8 PM, Monday to Thursday and a three hour block on Saturday or Sunday. We strongly discourage unnecessary walk-in clinic usage as not only does the Ministry of Health deduct the cost of the services charged from my pay, but also quite frequently the patient is in my office the next day or so to follow up on their walk in clinic experience. Unless there are no reasonable alternatives, please visit me or a member of my group for your primary care services. True emergencies of course should always be directed to the emergency department. The number to call for after hours clinic information is: 416-486-1956.

I would like to wish you all a year of good health, and look forward to working with you to achieve those goals.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ira Bernstein B.Sc, M.D., C.C.F.P., F.C.F.P.