

ADVICE TO MINISTER

CONFIDENTIAL ISSUES NOTE	Royal Columbian ER
Ministry: Health	
Date: 25 April 2006	
Minister Responsible: George Abbott	

KEY FACTS REGARDING THE ISSUE:

- Emergency room doctors at Royal Columbian hospital say that overcrowding in ER is leading to increased number of deaths. The doctors refer to a report written by two Royal Columbian doctors.

ADVICE AND RECOMMENDED RESPONSE:

- **Emergency rooms around the world face similar challenges to those we face in British Columbia. As our senior's population grows, so do the pressures on our emergency rooms. Emergency department visits in B.C. are increasing at twice the rate of population growth since 2003.**
- **In B.C. we are taking decisive action to meet these challenges. We are investing in emergency rooms, primary care, diagnostics and residential seniors care. By investing in the wide array of services, we will best manage challenges in the ER.**
- **We are proud of our health system, recently ranked by the Conference Board of Canada as Number 1 in the country. But we also must continuously make improvements both in our acute care system and in preventative health care to ensure B.C. remains Number 1, and that is what our government is doing.**
- **Generally speaking, the suggestions that are made in the plan are quite constructive, and we will look forward to working with Fraser Health to see whether any of those suggestions that are being made can be followed up on**
- **The report by ER doctors with respect to Royal Columbian contains no evidence that people have been dying on stretchers waiting for care.**

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Health Human Resources

- **Also key in this equation are our health human resources – and we are putting in place a very innovative strategy to ensure a healthy supply of doctors, nurses and other health professionals to care for patients.**
 - **We have expanded the number of education spaces for both nurses and doctors – with 2,500 more seats for nursing students since 2001 and almost double the number of medical school spaces.**
 - **And government has negotiated precedent-setting labour agreements – currently undergoing ratification – that focus on supporting our health care professionals, with clear incentives that recognize the challenges and put in place ways to address them....**
 - **The new agreements focus on aligning with our strategic policy direction – for example, encouraging more physicians to offer full-**

service family practice, and encouraging more new nursing graduates to go into regular full-time positions.

- As part of our recruitment and retention to increase the number of nurses practicing in the province, the agreement will provide incentives and improve working conditions, including addressing nursing workload issues, enabling more flexible scheduling and funding for difficult to fill shifts.

ROYAL COLUMBIAN MESSAGING

- The care provided at Royal Columbian is excellent, and patients should feel safe going to that hospital.
- The budget for Royal Columbian Hospital has increased by more than \$65 million in the past five years -- up from \$162 million in 2001/02 to \$227 million this year.

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- Fraser Health is also enlarging and improving the ICU at Royal Columbian, with an expected completion of Spring 2007.
- A number of measures have been put in place to expedite patient admissions, including:
 - A new manager of patient flow;
 - Developing a new trauma unit.
 - A new triage reassessment nurse;
 - Improved access to diagnostic imaging;
 - Expanded hours for the cardiac catheterization lab.
- Fraser Health has increased acute care bed days per thousand people by 2% since 2001/02.... This is increased capacity for the population compared to 2001/02 and is in contrast to the overall Canadian trend of diminishing acute care bed rates.

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PROVINCE-WIDE MESSAGING

- We are taking decisive action to improve emergency room care across B.C.
- Since 2001, the provincial government has invested \$100 million has been invested to improve access to emergency department care. And the \$1.8-billion worth of capital projects planned for the next three years will continue to improve patient access to emergency rooms.

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- Our recent tentative agreement with the BC Medical Association, currently being ratified, has several ER-focused initiatives, including \$9 million to increase compensation for ER doctors.
- Enhancing primary care is also crucial to reduce pressure system-wide. Currently BC has the highest number of GPs/family docs of any province per capita - but they need to be providing comprehensive care and significant numbers of patients in our emergency departments could be better cared for off site in a primary care setting; The agreement with BCMA will see \$136 million more per year for full-service family practitioners – a key part of our efforts.
- We are also speeding up service in the area of diagnostics. Patients who are appropriately being cared for in the ER also experience delays in diagnostics, consultations - speeding these processes up is also a focus of our work and requires cooperation of all personnel and professionals;
- We're working to speed up patient admissions into hospital wards from the ER. improving this flow depends on many different strategies including discharge protocols, expedited home care programs and prompt consultations to all kinds of different in hospital services.
- All our health authorities have been working together on these issues, and over the last fiscal year significant investments around the province in capital, home care, and mental health programs in the community, residential care, and primary care are starting to make a difference.
- The work we are doing in this area of care is built on best practice from around the world - it is an issue which needs daily energy and monitoring - capital plans for a number of institutions include plans for investment in expanding capacity in the ER - all of these initiatives assist in decongesting this important area of our health care system.

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