

May 21 2021

Via Email

The Honourable Brian Pallister
Premier of Manitoba
204 Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

The Honourable Heather Stefanson
Minister of Health and Seniors Care
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Dear Premier and Minister:

Re: Urgent Need for Critical Care Triage Protocol

We write with an urgent request for the government to immediately adopt a Critical Care Triage Protocol ("Triage Protocol") and issue an emergency order to allow for its implementation.

Manitoba is imminently facing the prospect of having insufficient ICU nurses and beds to manage the surge of patients with COVID-19, given the alarming rise of COVID-19 cases driven by new variants of concern. We understand that Manitoba has asked the federal government for 50 critical care nurses and 20 respiratory therapists to help manage the rising hospital admissions. We also understand that patients are being transferred out of province to free up ICU beds. These are important initial steps to manage the crisis. However, with the worsening COVID-19 situation in Manitoba, there remains a real risk that critical care resources are likely to become further overwhelmed. We know from the experiences in other jurisdictions that a surge of cases in hospital can result in devastating patient harm, especially to the most vulnerable Manitobans.

In this scenario, and without a Triage Protocol implemented by way of an emergency order, healthcare providers will be unable to prioritize access to ICU beds. Decisions will be made on an *ad hoc* basis without the benefit of a Triage Protocol that sets out a shared collective decision-making framework, which starts from the premise there are insufficient resources to treat everyone who needs access to an ICU bed. Without a Triage Protocol, healthcare providers will not be able to take the necessary steps to minimize the number of people who will die as a result of ICU overcapacity.

In this time of uncertainty, doctors and other healthcare providers should be reassured that their good faith efforts to make life and death decisions during the COVID-19 crisis is supported by government through an established Triage Protocol. Providing such reassurance is needed so that doctors and other healthcare providers have the confidence to continue providing safe care to their patients. The legal authority and framework can best be implemented by the province



through an emergency order under the *Emergency Measures Act* (EMA) in response to the current public health emergency. We are seriously concerned about burnout levels amongst doctors and other healthcare providers. The prospect of addressing the current surge of COVID-19 cases without the reassurance of a Triage Protocol and supported by an order made under the EMA is daunting and we believe has impacts on future resourcing of the healthcare system.

We urge the government to act now to adopt a Triage Protocol and issue an emergency order to allow for its implementation. Alberta and Québec have already taken this step in order to prepare the healthcare system. Doing so enhances system preparedness, ensures Manitoba's healthcare providers can continue providing needed safe care and helps to mitigate the worst-case scenarios in terms of loss of life to Manitobans.

We are available to provide any additional information that may be required to assist with the immediate adoption and implementation of a Triage Protocol.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Calder".

Dr. Lisa Calder, MD, MSc, FRCPC
Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director
LAC/ml

cc. Theresa Oswald, Doctors Manitoba
Dr. Anna Ziomek, College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba
Adam Topp, Shared Health
David McLaughlin, Clerk of the Executive Council and Cabinet Secretary
Catherine Gaulton, Healthcare Insurance Reciprocal of Canada