

COMMITTEE UPDATE

- The Committee welcomed new PHSA representative: Kendra McPherson, VP, Transformation & Sustainability.
- The SSC's virtual committee meeting focused specifically on the challenges and learnings experienced by specialists during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was decided that this edition of The Wrap reflect the same, and be shared with physician leaders and health authorities as an acknowledgement of on-the-ground realities experienced by specialists and other care providers during these challenging times.
- While there continue to be many challenges, it is important to recognize that this has also provided the opportunity for innovation through partnerships between physicians, health authorities and others.

CHALLENGES DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Personal Protective Equipment

- Access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) by physicians, both in acute and community-based settings, weighs heavily on many physicians. It should be noted that similar challenges are being experienced by health care workers on a global scale.
- Many specialists have concerns about the supply of PPE and continuous changes to protocols regarding proper use. There continues to be uncertainty around what is available at local sites and expected timelines for equipment deliveries.
- This has made it challenging for some physicians to balance delivering patient care while also following protocols and restrictions on PPE use.
- The result is that, in some sites, relationships between doctors and administrators which had been moving in a positive direction are being strained, with a sense of mistrust growing on both sides. It should be noted that in some other sites, relationships have become more positive and collaborative in the face of the COVID-19 crisis.

- Uncertainty about PPE supplies also exists in some communities. Many physicians are providing virtual care services and some have had to close their doors for the time being due to the shortage of PPE.
- The SSC acknowledges there is an opportunity to improve coordination and communication for both acute and community-based physicians on this issue.

Physician Remuneration

- It was recognized that many specialists are spending a considerable amount of time addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, whether it be on the front-lines caring for those infected, or for those involved with preparing and planning. Some physicians are able to access limited funds through some local Medical Staff Associations. In most cases, the time committed to indirect patient care and planning is currently not compensated.
- For specialists that have had their practices and income constrained due to the pandemic, there are concerns over limited financial resources to support office staff and overhead, particularly for specialists that do elective procedures and specialties that rely more on physical examination of patients.
- The SSC, along with the other Joint Clinical Committees, Doctors of BC, Ministry of Health and health authorities are aware of the significant challenges these issues are causing for physicians. The parties are currently exploring the extent to which some of these challenges can be addressed.

Other Issues

- A pause on many elective surgeries and diagnostics, especially for those with critical conditions such as cancer, is adding to the distress of patients as well as physicians unable to care for such patients. While there is general understanding of the need to allocate resources during the pandemic, it is hoped physicians can restart this work as soon as it can be done safely. Doctors of BC is supporting



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government in its planning to resume elective surgeries and diagnostics.

- Communication and collaboration between physicians and their local and health authority level leaders has been mixed. Some have seen positive improvements in relationships and collaboration during the crisis, while others experienced more challenges and frustration.
- Most health authorities are holding town halls/webinars for doctors to attend. Some physicians have voiced a desire for more two-way communication where they can provide some input into decision-making at the various health authority leadership tables such as the Emergency Operations Committees. This is taking place in some health authorities, but not all.
- It should be acknowledged that the pandemic is having a huge emotional and mental toll on frontline physicians and all health care workers. Some physicians say more communications and coordination at the health authority level would help to ease this tension.
- Frustrations related to the unknown and having to change things continuously, are echoed throughout the system as everyone receives evolving guidance from new evidence and conditions. This is not unexpected during a crisis of this magnitude and the whole health care system adapt, however, this does add to the emotional toll for those providing patient care.

POSITIVE INNOVATIONS

The Committee noted positive ways in which physicians and the system have been able to adapt to this challenging situation, including:

- Many stories of specialists who have taken personal initiative for COVID-19 planning and for working with multidisciplinary teams and family physicians to prepare care providers to deliver care for patients.
- The timely adjustment of fee codes, including the establishment of new temporary SSC fees and changes to billing rules of exiting MSP fees, to allow physicians to deliver patient care virtually and by phone.

- The coordination between SSC, Doctors Technology Office and PHSA to offer all community-based and facility-based specialists to obtain a Zoom for health care license.
- Many specialists are adopting virtual care, and some specialists have volunteered to be peer mentors to their colleagues not familiar with how to do it.
- Some community Divisions of Family Practice have coordinated and worked with community specialists to address local planning needs, such as PPE access, clinic space and funding.

OPPORTUNITIES

The SSC will be looking to address some of the identified gaps such as communication and coordination, and to leverage and build on some of the ideas generated by physicians and committee members.

The local collaboration between some Divisions of Family Practice and specialists provides a great opportunity to address community coordination and planning needs. This can hopefully be leveraged to involve specialists in other community priorities such as the development of Primary Care Networks. SSC will work with GP Services Committee to further support provider coordination and care delivery in the community.

As many of these challenges cannot be solved by the SSC alone, we will continue to leverage the ideas from physicians and will work with other JCCs and the partnerships between Doctors of BC, Ministry of Health and health authorities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND THANKS

On behalf of the SSC, thank you all the physicians and others working in the health system to address the challenges in this unprecedented time. We acknowledge the strains that you are facing professionally and personally. Let's support each other in these difficult times, and together we can pull through this.



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