

June 10, 2013

Dr. Chris Eagle
President and Chief Executive Officer
Alberta Health Services

Dear Dr. Eagle,

On behalf of Alberta residents who live with arthritis and our members and subscribers, Arthritis Consumer Experts (ACE) is registering dismay over the impending closure of the Rheumatology Specialty Rehabilitation Program based at the University of Alberta Hospital (UAH).

From its 14 years of providing patient education in Alberta and across Canada, ACE knows how vital the UAH program is for providing physical therapy and occupational therapy to people with arthritis. Physical therapy and occupational therapy are not merely “add-on” or “superfluous” treatments with unproven benefit. They are essential to a well-rounded treatment plan for preventing permanent joint damage, lost function, and work disability.

Taking these services away could slow or halt the recovery of thousands of Albertans who live with osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, dermatomyositis, systemic sclerosis, and systemic lupus erythematosus.

Furthermore, people newly diagnosed with arthritis have to learn how to keep doing, and adapt accordingly, the physical activities they once were lucky enough to take for granted. Physical and occupational therapies give patients time to adjust to and accept their diagnosis. As a person living with rheumatoid arthritis, I speak from experience.

Many of these diseases strike during the prime of life, between the ages of 20 and 50, thus leading to a situation where people who should be working and contributing to the economy are forced—not by choice—to become a burden on Alberta’s economy.

Taking these away would be like taking arthritis medications away. Cutting this rehabilitation program is akin to cutting a cancer recovery program.

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Given the Alberta government's conservative economic plan, the rehabilitation program should remain because taking it away will do nothing to save the province money when considering the economic burden of reducing people, who could be able-bodied and working, to patients dependent on welfare and disability programs.

Premier Redford has claimed that the future of Alberta's healthcare systems is her government's number one priority, stating "the need to make our system among the very best in the world." If she is serious about this, then she will reconsider closing the Rheumatology Specialty Rehabilitation Program.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Koehn
President and founder, Arthritis Consumer Experts

CC:

Mike Conroy, Senior Vice President Edmonton Zone
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