



March 18, 2020

Dr. Deena Hinshaw
The Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health
Government of Alberta

Re: COVID-19 The Role of Alberta Paramedics and Treat and Refer Directives

Dear: Dr. Hinshaw

The Alberta Paramedic Association (Association) is an elected representative organization that provides voice for Paramedic practitioners within their professional practice; our members include those practicing within the Emergency Health Services (EHS) system and outside of that system.

We are being asked by our members for information surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak as it pertains to their paramedic practice. Paramedics within Alberta Health Services (AHS) system, EHS system and beyond are asking for further direction surrounding assessment, treatment and/or transportation of suspected COVID-19 patients. There is an increasing observation by front line paramedics that they are transporting patients via ambulance who don't require emergency room care. This practice may be adding to the exponential spread of the virus as well as adding additional pressure to local emergency rooms.

To date, regardless of a patient's chief complaint, it is a standard practice for paramedics to transport all patients to the emergency room unless that patient refuses treatment/transport. While that standard would seem reasonable, we should recognize that not every patient who calls for an ambulance requires assessment/treatment at an emergency room, therefore it could be feasible that paramedics be issued a clear "treat and refer" directive that enables them to properly assess, treat and/or refer patients to an appropriate medical resource. In regards to the COVID-19 crisis, a clear directive for Paramedics that is similar to how hospitals are now pre-screening patients walking into emergency rooms would allow them to conduct the pre-screening questions, provide symptom relief treatment and if warranted, perform swabs and have the ability to inform people to stay home and self isolate.

The benefits of a treat and refer directive would include but not be limited to; reducing the risk of spreading the virus, reducing the overload at emergency rooms, redirecting patients to

appropriate points of care, reducing the shortage of cleaning supplies and time needed to clean ambulances, thus increase their availability for emergency response.

The Alberta Paramedic Association is here for our community and our members. We bring these issues forward to you as Paramedics who are concerned for themselves, their families and their community. Paramedics are a significant resource who bring forward valuable skills and critical thinking in situations such as these to assist Albertans.

Thank you for your time in the midst of unprecedented times. We the Association look forward to assisting you wherever possible. Please contact me at dusty@albertaparamedics.ca.

I look forward to hearing from you.



Dusty Myshrall, ACP, Flight Paramedic
President
Alberta Paramedic Association



cc Honourable Tyler Shandro,
Minister of Health