

April 18, 2020

The Honourable Christine Elliott  
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health  
5th Floor, 777 Bay St.  
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Dear Minister Elliott,

As the President of the Ontario College of Family Physicians, I am writing to implore you to do what you can to ensure family doctors can remain open to seeing patients virtually and in-person. We are trying to send the message out to the public that “Your family doctor is there for you”, but it is difficult to do so when their ability to stay open is severely compromised by lack of income. We know it is not the OCFP’s role to address negotiations for physicians, but our members are writing us daily to address inappropriate delays in reimbursement for care provided. We sent a letter with the Section on General and Family Practice to Mr. Patrick Dicerni on April 13, 2020 asking that payment for the new codes for virtual care be resolved urgently and await an answer.

We appreciate the speed at which the K and H codes were agreed upon in March. In turn and in good faith that they would be supported, family physicians very quickly shifted their practices to provide virtual care for the majority of their patients, maintained important in-person care if they have the required PPE, and stepped forward in the assessment centres. We acknowledge that the acute care priorities need to be addressed and understand the challenges in long-term care and congregate living. Indeed, the province’s family doctors provide care in these settings and know firsthand about the impact of the pandemic.

To hear that the K and H codes will not be paid until some time in June or July – even though the shift to virtual care and staffing assessment centres started in mid-March – is unacceptable. In my discussions with colleagues across Canada, family physicians in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, PEI, Saskatchewan and Manitoba are currently receiving payment for their virtual codes and maintaining a functioning primary care system. I have no doubt that Ontario has the technological capacity and wherewithal to fix a computer glitch.

Many family physicians who rely on fees for service will be unable to keep their offices open. These family doctors are small business owners who will no longer be able to pay rent and may be forced to lay off nurses and administrative staff in their offices. There are enough layoffs in Ontario, and we cannot afford the additional loss of healthcare resources and infrastructure, especially when family practices in primary care are considered essential services and where most patient interactions occur. Reduced hours, closures, and family physicians leaving their practices will erode accessibility, quality and safety of care for Ontarians.

In communication with our members, not one of them wants to close or reduce the care they provide patients with whom they have had lifetime relationships. What this pandemic has laid bare are serious chasms in the health system, not the least of which are the gaps experienced by a significant portion of our members who are not in capitated payment models. I would hope this government would not want a practice type to determine Ontarians' access to their family doctor.

We know the 3rd and 4th waves of this pandemic will see the impact of interrupted care on chronic diseases, and mental health and burnout among the public and healthcare providers. While we have a critical focus on COVID and non-COVID, there are also Ontarians who are sick and need the assurance that their family doctor can be there for them. Patients will need strong primary care and access to their family physicians to keep them healthy.

These issues must be addressed immediately. On behalf of the essential role that family physicians play in primary care, emergency departments, long-term care, and home care, I urge you to fix the billing issues that allow all offices to offer high-quality and safe care to their patients.

Respectfully,



Dr. Jennifer Young  
President

- cc. Ms. Robin Martin, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Health
- Ms. Helen Angus, Deputy Minister of Health
- Ms. Heather Watt, Chief of Staff, Office of the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
- Mr. Patrick Dicerri, Assistant Deputy Minister and General Manager, OHIP
- Ms. Nadia Surani, Director (Acting), Primary Health Care Branch
- Ms. Harpreet Bassi, Director of Policy, Office of the Minister of Health
- Ms. Laurel Brazill, Director, Stakeholder Relations, Office of the Minister of Health
- Board of Directors, OCFP
- Dr. Sohail Gandhi, President, Ontario Medical Association
- Dr. Allan Studniberg, Chair, Section on General and Family Practice