

July 9, 2010

Fred Horne, MLA
Co-Chair of Minister's Advisory Committee on Health (MACH)

Re: Alberta Health Act Consultation Submission

Introduction

The College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta (CLPNA) welcomes the Government of Alberta's invitation to participate in the review of the province's health care. The Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) excels in delivering skilled, knowledgeable, caring and compassionate nursing to Albertans in need of care. This profession is committed to working within a comprehensive, universal, portable, publicly-administered, and accessible health care system. We are pleased to support the Government of Alberta's commitment to these guiding principles, which are the core of the Canada Health Act; and its commitment to sustainable public health care.

As nursing professionals who work within their own Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice and within a well defined scope of practice, LPNs are regulated by the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta. For Alberta LPNs, nursing is more than a job: it is a profession, and it is a call to public service. For six decades the LPN profession has played a central and critical role as frontline nurses who are the skilled providers of bedside care. LPNs have the professional training, ability and capacity to play an active role in all areas where care is provided, including but not limited to: prevention, acute care, community care, public health, long-term care, palliative care. In a survey which drew 1461 responses from Alberta LPNs, nine of ten LPNs agreed "I am committed to using my full education and skills" and perceive that "my actions are improving health care for my patients."

Educated within the same body of nursing knowledge as Registered Nurses (RN) and Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPN), Alberta's LPNs complete a two-year college diploma that includes a minimum of 750 hours of theoretical instruction and 900 hours of clinical and lab experience. LPNs can obtain specialty registration through advanced study in the areas of immunization, renal dialysis, advanced orthopaedics, perioperative nursing and foot care. Being accountable for their own nursing practice,

LPNs in Alberta assume full responsibility for the care they provide. As members of a self-regulating profession, LPNs must meet registration requirements set out by the CLPNA.

The LPN profession has a central and indispensable role in caring for Albertans. The LPN works collaboratively with other health care professionals to ensure the delivery of high quality health care. As a result of their education there is significant overlap between the role of the LPN , the RN and the RPN.

The CLPNA believes in a health care system in which each profession should do what it does best, where overlap should be minimized, and where each professional is expected to work to the full extent of their skill and ability. Surveys regarding appropriate literacy skills and levels in the workforce have found that highly educated professionals lose their literacy if their skills are applied at a level well below their training and ability. This is reflected in an analysis done by Dr. Scott Murray of DataAngel in December 2009 for the Province of Alberta Adult Education Division in the Department of Labour and Workforce Development on literacy skills in key sectors of the Alberta economy and workforce. Based on the evidence it makes no sense that professionals should work below their full potential. Full utilization of all health professionals is critical to increasing productivity and efficiencies within the system.

1) What are your organization's views on the appropriateness of the overarching principles proposed for the Alberta Health Act (pp. 10-15 of the MACH report) Are there additional principles you would propose?

- A publicly funded and accessible health care system which provides quality care must be sustained not simply through funding, but through the long-term planning and resource allocation that will ensure consistent, high-quality care.
- When it comes to the workforce; CLPNA believes that overlapping roles need to be better defined, so that each of the health care professions working collaboratively focuses on what they can do best. Health care is best delivered by a well integrated team of professionals each utilizing their full scope of practice.
- Educated, appropriately regulated health professionals with a clear scope of practice must be involved in providing health care. Unregulated workers must be monitored and supervised to perform identified standards of practice.
- Improve performance by removing barriers that prevent full use of the workforce: CLPNA asserts that collaborative teams of professionals are exceptionally adept at delivering health care. A top-down, command-and-control hierarchy can impede the flexibility and responsiveness necessary for best quality care. Replacing vertical administrative structures with horizontal ones thus becomes paramount. A cultural shift in health care that enhances the value and contribution of all health professions is essential. CLPNA believes this shift should encourage

innovation and research that is independent and enhances the health-care system. The public interest must trump the self-interest of any particular profession.

- Policies are required that enable interdisciplinary team collaborative practice: Professionals deliver collaborative care, but need workplace and administrative structures that foster and facilitate collaboration.
- Alignment of Legislation that promotes safety with a people focused approach: CLPNA believes the scope and diversity of professional regulators promotes safety and professionalism. Policies and procedures must include effective feedback loops.

People and their families at the centre of their health care

This principle is key to an effective system. LPNS should be used to their fullest scope of practice.

Increasing and encouraging education in health professions for Aboriginal and remote communities will enable greater access to services by trained professionals who understand and support the communities way of life.

Be committed to quality and safety

While evidence based practice decisions are important to ensure quality and safety in the system, there are many best practices in health care that have never been researched. However we must not limit innovation and best practice by expecting research validation for all decisions.

Curriculum focusing on safety competencies from the Canadian Patient Safety Institute is necessary throughout health care to ensure best practice.

Ensure equitable access to timely and appropriate care

LPNs are utilized in rural and remote care settings in many initiatives that involve specialist support via telehealth ensuring timely and appropriate access with great success.

Enable decision-making using the best available evidence

Innovation must be based on best practices and when gaps exist in evidence, funding and support to advance the research in those areas must be investigated.

Most research in nursing is focused on the Registered Nurse in acute care settings. Research should also focus on the important role of LPNs in care delivery, to ensure stronger evidence for decisions in important policy areas such as staff mix, safety, and utilization.

All decision making should be transparent and accountable.

Be focused on wellness and public health

CLPNA welcomes an emphasis on public health care focused on wellness and prevention. Licensed Practical Nurses are prepared with background in prevention and wellness. New initiatives in public health, primary care, and wellness are necessary to enhance the services in these areas and LPNs are well positioned to be part of the solution.

Foster a culture of trust and respect

CLPNA supports this principle. Turf protection, job protectionism, and political posturing of the old guard threaten teams every day. Interprofessional trust must be built throughout the health care system.

2) What are your organization's views about rights, responsibilities and other components that should be included in the Alberta patient charter (pp. 24-25 of the MACH report)?

The Canada Health Act offers a robust framework. CLPNA needs to understand what this Charter might achieve, that the Canada Health Act does not. Illumination would be welcome. Any change in this direction should avoid measures that open the door to more extensive legal questioning of the judgment of health care professionals.

3) Please provide your views as desired on the other components of the Alberta Health Act proposed by MACH (pp. 16-23 of the MACH report).

It is critical that any mention of regulated health providers facilitates and reflects the Health Professions Act; whereby the philosophy of autonomy, inclusivity, collaboration, and full utilization of the workforce remain as fundamental principles. Consistency among definitions related to professional titles must be ensured throughout the new Legislation.

Review and alignment of the Health Quality Council of Alberta and the development of the new research entity should be considered core priorities. Maintaining safety and integrating research and innovation into the health system are critical to new Legislation that is supported by the public.

4) Going forward, how should the public, health professionals and other stakeholders be consulted in the development and review of future legislation, regulation and policy (p. 26 of the report)?

When Legislation affects more than one professional group, consultation should be collaborative, transparent, and include fair representation. This consultative process must be comprehensive, allowing for adequate time to involve members and stakeholders appropriately. Existing Legislation contains conflicting terminology that has political impact if changes are made. It may be necessary for government to facilitate and guide groups toward acceptance of impending changes. Uniformly developed data gathering tools are necessary to allow for unbiased responses that are not moulded by certain group's political agendas.

The Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta are committed to delivering, skilled, knowledgeable, compassionate care to the citizens of Alberta .The CLPNA appreciates the opportunity to provide a response to the proposed Health Act.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda L. Stanger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Linda L. Stanger, BN MSA
Executive Director/Registrar
CLPNA