

An Open Letter to Residents of Sylvan Lake & Area Regarding Changes to Current On Call Service

April 18, 2016

The physicians of the Sylvan Lake Family Health Centre, and Sylvan Medical Clinic regret to inform the citizens of Sylvan Lake and area about changes to the physician *On Call Service* effective June 1, 2016.

For decades, local doctors have offered 24/7/365 after-hours care to our community, at our closed clinics, with no support. Over time our population has rapidly grown at a rate of almost 5% a year, and this does not factor in population fluxes in the summer due to the tourism industry. We have worked earnestly with the Urgent Care Committee in Sylvan Lake for five years, trying to find a stable solution to this challenge. In addition, our physician group was active in conversations about this issue for five additional years prior to the establishment of the committee. We have had many conversations with Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health in that time, seeking out any opportunity to solve this dilemma, and we have worked through several major evaluations, assessments, and proposals.

We regret to report that, in over a decade, none of this has led to an after-hours solution for Sylvan Lake and area. We know of no community in Alberta that has been asked to look after a population of 20,000, which approximately doubles in the summer, with absolutely no support from Alberta Health Services for Lab, Diagnostic Imaging, Nursing, or Support staff outside of limited business hours. The current On Call Service is unsustainable. Although physician safety and burnout is an issue of concern, patient safety is by far and away the most significant and serious concern.

Given the ever increasing, complicating factors, the *On Call Service*, as the town has known it, will cease to exist June 1, 2016.

The physicians in Sylvan Lake will continue to provide phone coverage for our personal patients after hours, which is a duty of our profession; however, *we will no longer return to see patients at closed clinics, and we are no longer able to look after patients in any capacity who are not directly attached to a physician at Sylvan Family Health Centre, Sylvan Medical Clinic, or the office of Dr. Stephen Fugler.*

We know from our data that changes to our On Call Service will mean an additional 2,000-3,000 visits to emergency departments in the next year; this is in addition to the already 3,000 community members forced elsewhere as a result of lack of health care service and access locally.

We believe that Sylvan Lake has a progressive group of professional providers with amazing staff at our clinics, and fantastic professional staff provided by the Wolf Creek Primary Care Network. The situation is right for the development of an innovative solution to our community concerns, but we need our service delivery partners (AHS) and provincial funders (Alberta Health) to prioritize this issue for any action to occur. We will continue to work with the Urgent Care Committee, and our Zonal Leadership to identify a long-term and sustainable solution to a problem that most certainly will continue to grow, and we deeply apologize for the inconvenience that these changes will no doubt cause.

The physicians of:
Sylvan Family Health Centre
Sylvan Medical Clinic