

January 18, 2010

AHS accepts Implementation Team Report *Improvements to mental health care in progress*

EDMONTON – After an extensive review and consultation process that began in October, the Alberta Hospital Edmonton Implementation Team (the I-Team) has made the following recommendations to Alberta Health Services (AHS):

- Establish a geriatric mental health campus that would co-locate a number of services and would be a hub for geriatric mental health programs and services in the Edmonton area;
- Include Villa Caritas, a new 150-bed facility that will open later this year, and other Covenant Health facilities at the Misericordia West Edmonton site as part of this campus;
- Once Villa Caritas is fully equipped, staffed and ready, transfer the regional geriatric psychiatry program from Alberta Hospital Edmonton to this new site.

Following consultation with Gene Zwozdesky, Minister of Health and Wellness, AHS will accept the I-Team's recommendations. In addition, AHS will withdraw proposals to transfer 146 beds from the acute psychiatry and rehabilitation psychiatry programs at Alberta Hospital Edmonton to other facilities.

"Alberta Health Services will work collaboratively with stakeholders to develop a province-wide plan for mental health. Proposals for improvements in mental health services, including AHE programs, will be developed within this context. We are committed to doing more consultation to ensure that we are providing the best possible care for Albertans who require mental health programs and services," said Ken Hughes, AHS Board Chair.

"Albertans with mental health needs are vulnerable citizens and, in keeping with our Premier's commitment, we will help them in every way possible," said Zwozdesky. "They and their families must know that their needs will be met with dignity, respect and compassion. These recommendations are a positive step toward that objective.

"A broader look at mental health needs province-wide will ensure a positive future that reflects the priorities of patients and of the province. The I-Team's work is now concluded and I extend our sincerest thanks to them for a job well done," Zwozdesky added.

AHS CEO Dr. Stephen Duckett, added, "Minister Zwozdesky, Chair Hughes and I have reviewed the I-Team's recommendations and I want to assure everyone that I, too, am committed to acting on them. That commitment includes not moving any beds unless and until better facilities are available."

“When Premier Stelmach established the I-Team he asked us to consult with AHE staff, physicians, community representatives and program users. I can assure you that our team did that,” said Edmonton-Rutherford MLA Fred Horne, Premier Stelmach’s representative on the committee. “In particular, I want to thank co-chairs Dennis Anderson and Don Sieben for adhering to our principle of doing what’s right for the patients and improving quality of care.”

Villa Caritas will be operated by Covenant Health. All support programs and resources available to patients in the geriatric psychiatry program at AHE will be transferred and available to patients on the new campus.

“From a patient perspective, this will mean more room, and a less institutional atmosphere for treatment and recovery,” said Gail Tricker, Program Manager of Alberta Hospital Edmonton’s Geriatric Psychiatry Program. “It’s an opportunity for Geriatric Psychiatry to move forward toward community-based treatment to meet the needs of patients now and in the future.”

“We look forward to working with Alberta Health Services and the Alberta Hospital Edmonton team as we consult with the mental health community and the patients we serve. We want to establish a strong program at Villa Caritas that will enhance quality and expand services for those most vulnerable in our society,” said Patrick Dumelie, President and CEO of Covenant Health.

The Forensic Unit at AHE, which was not part of the original proposal, will also remain at AHE, along with adult acute care and rehabilitation care.

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** Backgrounders (2) attached*

For more information:

Fred Horne, MLA Edmonton-Rutherford: (780) 414-1311

Dennis Anderson, Committee Co-Chair: (780) 504-7710

Don Stewart, Alberta Health Services: (403) 943-1210