

To All Members:

BC radiologists are once again raising concerns to the BCRS as Alberta announced the early termination of contracts for radiology groups providing service to Calgary and Edmonton hospitals on March 16th. This announcement highlights a disturbing trend occurring in Canada where radiology service agreements are being terminated by health authorities independently or as directed by government. Such was the case in 2015 in Regina, and here in BC in 2018, impacting the radiology groups in Lower Mainland. The groups in the Lower Mainland are still in discussion, with their contracts being rolled over on a continued basis.

While the BCRS is still unsure of the exact motivation behind the contract cancellations in the Lower Mainland, the reason for the cancellation in both Regina and Alberta is clear; a belief that the diagnostic services being provided were or overvalued and going to "market" would reduce these costs. Regina went to tender for MRI services and awarded the contract to an Alberta-based group. It was also the intent of the health authority to break up the group practice and offer individual contracts to the radiologists. Some radiologists left, some went on individual contracts and the Alberta group provided MRI services in the community. Through ongoing dialogue with radiologist leadership in Saskatchewan, we know the group in Regina is reforming and that there is growing dissatisfaction with the external group contracted for MRI services linked to after-hours call amongst other things. Some of the other impacts have been more standardization of fees, with the Saskatchewan Health Authority looking to jurisdictions like BC and our published fee guide. Until that time, fees were negotiated directly between radiology groups and the hospital/health authorities.

In Alberta, it is the understanding of the BCRS that the same model of fee negotiations exists for services provided for Alberta Health Services (AHS) and/or the site specific hospitals. With the claim made by government that radiologists in Alberta are over-compensated when compared to other provinces, and with some possible variation in the contract values between AHS sites, the motivation of the Alberta government is very clear; cost reduction in the services provided. That government has taken the extra-ordinary and somewhat draconian step in first tearing up the Alberta Physician Master Agreement, paving the way to launch other efforts with radiology being one of the first targets.

The Alberta Society of Radiology is on top of this issue, looking to validate total incomes of radiologists in Alberta, as compared to the primary comparator provinces of Ontario and BC. Both Ontario and BC have published fee guides that follow their way into the health authority system, so getting total billing paid out by MSP, in our case, is public information. However, Alberta's efforts are being frustrated by being unable to get billing/payment data from all revenue sources for radiologists, which as we know here in BC, is difficult to mine out with no motivation to do so.

So, in reality, BC radiologists and the system here has already tested these waters. The BCRS has and will continue to be engaged in any effort undertaken by the government, the Ministry of Health and/or the health authorities where change within the medical imaging system is being contemplated. We will maintain our strategy to be actively involved, be part of the solution and put patients first.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-radiology-contracts-termination-notice-pandemic-1.5499535>

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