

June 15, 2006

Alberta Ombudsman now able to review patient concerns

Edmonton... The province's commitment to offer the highest quality, patient focused health care will be enhanced by allowing Albertans unsatisfied with a health authority's response to a patient concern or complaint to ask the Alberta Ombudsman to review the decision.

"While most concerns can be resolved by health authorities, adding the Ombudsman to the process further enhances fairness and accountability and emphasizes the health system's commitment to quality care," said Iris Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness.

"We are very pleased to receive this new jurisdiction," said G.B. (Gord) Button, Alberta Ombudsman. "The independent oversight of the Ombudsman will bring transparency and fairness to the patient concerns resolution process within the health system."

The new regulation under the *Regional Health Authorities Act* and the *Cancer Programs Act* provides greater direction to health authorities about their patient concerns resolution process. This regulation, along with amendments made to the *Ombudsman Act*, give the Ombudsman the authority to review decisions, recommendations, actions or omissions in the patient concerns resolution processes of regional health authorities, the Alberta Mental Health Board and the Alberta Cancer Board. The changes come into effect on September 1, 2006.

For several years, health authorities have established their own process to resolve patient concerns. The new process ensures that caregivers at the front-line will continue to be the first place to address concerns or complaints. The Ombudsman's review has been added as a final step to the process and is available to Albertans after all other resolution measures have been pursued.

The Ombudsman is an officer of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and reports directly to the Legislative Assembly. The Ombudsman operates independently from any part of the Alberta government and individual elected officials. The authority for the Ombudsman to investigate complaints is found in the *Ombudsman Act*.

For more information on the Ombudsman visit www.ombudsman.ab.ca.

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