



**Doctors Manitoba**  
20 Desjardins Drive  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3X 0E8 Canada  
**T:** 204 985-5888  
**T:** 1 888 322-4242 (toll free)  
**F:** 204 985-5844

**VIA EMAIL**

May 22, 2021

Dear Critical Care or ER Physician,

We are forwarding a copy of a letter the Canadian Medical Protective Agency (CMPA) sent to the Premier and Minister of Health regarding the immediate need for a triage protocol, given the capacity situation in Manitoba's ICUs.

We called for the development of such a protocol last year too, based on your advice and concern for your patients. We also know the absence of such a protocol is causing distress and concern among physicians, ethicists, disability groups and others. We have followed up with Shared Health and provincial officials to again call for the immediate development of such a protocol.

While the triage protocol has been portrayed publicly by some as a decision-making tool for who gets an ICU bed and who doesn't, we know it is much more than this. With the current unprecedented demand, a clear and transparent triage protocol is needed to guide decision-making about access to the expanded ICU capacity, such as which patients are transferred out of province, which are best suited to make-shift ICU space, which are held in ERs and what happens if and when there are more patients than spaces. We've explained this to provincial officials, and reminded them that all those involved in care need a consistent and common understanding of how decisions like this are made. And they need it now.

We pointed out that other provinces have recognized the need to develop protocols like this, such as in Alberta and Quebec, where similar dire circumstances have existed. The need is even greater in Manitoba with the added complexity of patients being transported out of province.

In the absence of such a protocol, decisions are being made on an ad hoc basis, and that creates confusion and results in delays care. Delays for intensive care, even just a few minutes, can have life-and-death consequences for critically-ill patients.

We've offered Doctors Manitoba's assistance over the weekend to support addressing this issue, including helping to bring decision-makers and critical care physicians together to review a draft protocol. If you have concerns or suggestions, please continue to keep in touch by emailing us at [covid19@doctorsmanitoba.ca](mailto:covid19@doctorsmanitoba.ca).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T. Oswald".

**THERESA OSWALD,**  
Chief Executive Officer

TO/jb

May 21 2021

*Via Email*

The Honourable Brian Pallister  
Premier of Manitoba  
204 Legislative Building  
450 Broadway  
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

The Honourable Heather Stefanson  
Minister of Health and Seniors Care  
450 Broadway  
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Dear Premier and Minister:

**Re: Urgent Need for Critical Care Triage Protocol**

We write with an urgent request for the government to immediately adopt a Critical Care Triage Protocol ("Triage Protocol") and issue an emergency order to allow for its implementation.

Manitoba is imminently facing the prospect of having insufficient ICU nurses and beds to manage the surge of patients with COVID-19, given the alarming rise of COVID-19 cases driven by new variants of concern. We understand that Manitoba has asked the federal government for 50 critical care nurses and 20 respiratory therapists to help manage the rising hospital admissions. We also understand that patients are being transferred out of province to free up ICU beds. These are important initial steps to manage the crisis. However, with the worsening COVID-19 situation in Manitoba, there remains a real risk that critical care resources are likely to become further overwhelmed. We know from the experiences in other jurisdictions that a surge of cases in hospital can result in devastating patient harm, especially to the most vulnerable Manitobans.

In this scenario, and without a Triage Protocol implemented by way of an emergency order, healthcare providers will be unable to prioritize access to ICU beds. Decisions will be made on an *ad hoc* basis without the benefit of a Triage Protocol that sets out a shared collective decision-making framework, which starts from the premise there are insufficient resources to treat everyone who needs access to an ICU bed. Without a Triage Protocol, healthcare providers will not be able to take the necessary steps to minimize the number of people who will die as a result of ICU overcapacity.

In this time of uncertainty, doctors and other healthcare providers should be reassured that their good faith efforts to make life and death decisions during the COVID-19 crisis is supported by government through an established Triage Protocol. Providing such reassurance is needed so that doctors and other healthcare providers have the confidence to continue providing safe care to their patients. The legal authority and framework can best be implemented by the province



through an emergency order under the *Emergency Measures Act* (EMA) in response to the current public health emergency. We are seriously concerned about burnout levels amongst doctors and other healthcare providers. The prospect of addressing the current surge of COVID-19 cases without the reassurance of a Triage Protocol and supported by an order made under the EMA is daunting and we believe has impacts on future resourcing of the healthcare system.

We urge the government to act now to adopt a Triage Protocol and issue an emergency order to allow for its implementation. Alberta and Québec have already taken this step in order to prepare the healthcare system. Doing so enhances system preparedness, ensures Manitoba's healthcare providers can continue providing needed safe care and helps to mitigate the worst-case scenarios in terms of loss of life to Manitobans.

We are available to provide any additional information that may be required to assist with the immediate adoption and implementation of a Triage Protocol.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Calder".

Dr. Lisa Calder, MD, MSc, FRCPC  
Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director  
LAC/ml

cc. Theresa Oswald, Doctors Manitoba  
Dr. Anna Ziomek, College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba  
Adam Topp, Shared Health  
David McLaughlin, Clerk of the Executive Council and Cabinet Secretary  
Catherine Gaulton, Healthcare Insurance Reciprocal of Canada