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NEWS RELEASE

**HQCA study shines a light on opportunities to improve  
Albertans' experiences when receiving specialized healthcare services**

(Calgary, AB) - The Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) today released the *Continuity of Patient Care Study*. The study identifies that the current processes in Alberta's healthcare system for managing the complex dealings between referring physicians and specialists or clinics offering specialized healthcare services are variable and may not always be sufficiently reliable to protect patients' continuity of care.

The study was triggered by Albertans' co-ordination of care rating in the HQCA's patient experience survey. In 2012, less than 50% of respondents rated how well healthcare professionals co-ordinated their efforts to serve their needs as very good or excellent, which is unchanged since 2003. Healthcare providers have also expressed concerns about this area of healthcare delivery.

In the report, continuity of care is examined through the lens of a single patient's journey, and identifies opportunities to improve several aspects of how care is co-ordinated among providers and settings.

"The HQCA examined and shared this patient's story because we believe the many challenges he faced in trying to obtain co-ordinated care for his serious and time-sensitive condition are representative of the experiences of others," said Patricia Pelton, acting chief executive officer of the HQCA. "The study shed light on this important area of healthcare delivery and reveals opportunities to improve the healthcare system for all Albertans."

The study analyzed many aspects of referral management in the healthcare system as well as the role radiologists play in prioritizing and coordinating advanced diagnostic imaging studies for patients with time-sensitive conditions. The study's focus was not to find fault with individuals, but to identify factors in the system that can compromise patient safety and health service quality.

"Looking back systematically at the care patients received to identify vulnerabilities in the health system is a powerful approach for learning how to improve," said Dr. Ward Flemons, HQCA medical advisor and study author. "We identified that many individuals and groups have responsibility for assuring continuity of care, and share accountability for ensuring our recommended changes move forward."

The recommendations, if implemented, would mitigate the risk patients in our current healthcare system face due to breakdowns in the continuity of care. A full discussion of the issues, analysis, and recommendations appears in the main report which can be found at [www.hqca.ca](http://www.hqca.ca). The HQCA identified 10 recommendations to address the issues highlighted in the report and an additional three recommendations to address a supplementary issue that was identified while reviewing this case.



*The Health Quality Council of Alberta gathers and analyzes information and collaborates with Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, health professions, academia and other stakeholders to translate that knowledge into practical improvements to health service quality and patient safety in the health care system.*

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