



The Honourable Jason Kenney
Premier of Alberta
307 Legislature Building
10800 97 Avenue
Edmonton AB T5K 2B6

September 27, 2021

EZMSA Office
Suite 201 12315 Stony Plain Road NW
Edmonton, AB
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Dear Premier Kenney:

Re: MLA Shane Clayton Getson attack on Dr. Verna Yiu

It is with great dismay, disappointment, and indignation that we feel we must respond to the statements made on Facebook by MLA Getson. These statements, directed at Alberta Health Services (AHS) CEO, Dr. Verna Yiu, cannot be left uncontested, for they demonstrate an abysmal lack of understanding about our health system and public health.

Our first concern is the egregious personal attack on Dr. Yiu, who has successfully led AHS since 2016. Her leadership has provided much-needed stability and credibility to the role of CEO. She has proven her ability to respond to public health care emergencies in the past; the fire in Fort McMurray is an excellent example of how she mobilized the system to respond to an acute need. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Yiu has yet again provided exemplary service and leadership for all Albertans – which makes the attack on her character even more malicious.

We question the intent of the comments on her salary. AHS is responsible for the public health and acute care needs of 4.3 million Albertans and has a budget of \$15.5 billion. With 102,000 employees, it is Alberta's largest employer and the largest single health authority in all of Canada. Dr. Yiu's salary of \$573,841 is not more than that of similar positions. For comparison, Enbridge has approximately 11,000 employees, and its CEO is paid \$17M. Ernst & Young's 2019 AHS review indicates the salaries of CEOs in organizations of similar size in Ontario exceed that paid to Dr. Yiu. Given these facts, it is particularly loathsome and cowardly for an elected official to attack a public servant working in health care during a pandemic. We are concerned that such attacks will dissuade future medical professionals from seeking leadership roles and utilizing their skills and expertise to guide our public health care system.



Our second concern stems from the complete lack of understanding about ICU capacity demonstrated by MLA Getson. Alberta entered this pandemic with a beleaguered health system. Frontline worker morale was dismal, and a key part of our best defense against a pandemic – our primary care system – had already been under attack before the pandemic began. This can be laid at the feet of the Alberta government of which MLA Getson is a part. Despite these challenges, our health system and its workers have responded as required to care for Albertans throughout this pandemic. We have all shown up to work every day.

Physicians know that being in ICU is to be avoided if possible. ICU admittance indicates a high risk of death. Survivors are often left with a disability. It is a traumatizing experience for the patient and the patient's family. A properly functioning health system is one that takes effective precautions and does all it can to avoid preventable ICU admissions.

At the beginning of the pandemic, a surge such as Alberta's fourth wave occurred in jurisdictions like New York and Italy. That first surge was unavoidable because it hit early and hard, before we knew much about the novel COVID-19 virus and had vaccines. The current surge is unforgivable; it was both predictable and avoidable. Your decision, Premier, to irresponsibly abandon all precautions against the Delta variant in July – and the further decision to suppress the data in August showing that the fourth wave would be extremely serious – guaranteed that the number of cases would overwhelm the system. Furthermore, the complete failure to take effective public health and policy measures when the fourth wave was readily apparent has resulted in 15 Albertans dying every day. Our government continues to choose death over appropriate measures.

Your decisions placed us in this situation, not AHS leadership. Rather, AHS is left to struggle as best it can at a time when frontline staff are exhausted. We have worked to build surge capacity by asking more and more of ourselves and our patients. We have fought to build new capacity to delay having to activate a triage protocol that will cause long term grief and moral injury for health care workers and patients' families. This remarkable increase in bed availability has only been made possible through the exceptional leadership of Dr. Yiu, AHS leadership, and the backbreaking work of people on the frontlines. Albertans are getting an unprecedented amount more than a "good bang for their buck" from their health system.

MLA Getson stating 1,000 ICU beds is magical thinking. He does not understand that tripling the number of ICU beds to 1,000 ICU beds requires time, money, space, and an immediate tripling of experienced, well-trained personnel, which is wishful thinking. Furthermore, if 1,000 ICU beds are required, it will mean that continued inaction by the Alberta Government has allowed 100,000 new COVID cases in Alberta (1% of cases require ICU) and thousands more deaths. This is what we all need to prevent, and Dr. Yiu is more than doing her part.

Our third concern is Alberta Health (i.e. the Alberta government) directs AHS operations. AHS responds to policy and direction from Alberta Health, and in the case of this pandemic, also the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Prior to this fourth wave there was no urgency – or even direction – from Alberta Health to get to 1,000 ICU beds. In fact, the government assured



Albertans that the United Conservative Party “Open for Summer” plan would not result in a fourth wave. This government gambled the stability of our health system and people’s lives on the faulty premise that hospitalizations and ICU admissions would be decoupled from new cases. Your gamble, Premier, resulted in rising cases and hospitalizations. Deflecting to AHS leadership for not being prepared for a disaster you created and refused to plan for is ridiculous.

MLA Getson has failed to uphold political leader responsibility. His statements represent bullying and harassment. He is also spreading misinformation about ICU capacity. Both are unacceptable, especially at this time of crisis. MLA Getson should publicly apologize to Dr. Yiu for his attempted character assassination. He should apologize to health care workers across the province for insulting the hard work, compassion, and professionalism they show every day. The families and loved ones of the 234 Albertans that have died since September 1st – whose deaths were preventable if the government had acted responsibly – deserve an apology. Albertans who have done their part making good choices for their community deserve an apology. Every Albertan deserves an apology from MLA Getson and the party he represents, for the false and malicious attack on Dr. Yiu and attempted spread of misinformation. His resignation would be an appropriate way to show his actual regret.

Sincerely,

Dr. Erika MacIntyre, President
Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association

Dr. Cheryl Mack, Vice-President

CC: MLA Shane Clayton Getson
Hon. Jason Copping, Minister of Health
Dr. Verna Yiu, Chief Executive Officer, Alberta Health Services

Dr. Ernst Schuster, MD
Family Physician

Dr. Noel Gibney, MD
Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta

Dr. Jennine Wismark, MD
Family Physician

Dr. Ilan Schwartz, MD
Infectious Diseases Physician

Dr. Richard Owen, MD
Radiologist

Dr. Shazma Mithani, MD
Emergency Department Physician

Dr. Katherine Kasha, MD
Family Physician

Dr. James Talbot, MD
Public Health Physician

Dr. Shelley Duggan, MD
Critical Care Physician

Dr. Tehseen Ladha, MD
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