

# Alberta Doctors' Digest

## New podcast for Alberta physicians

In the podcast series *Alberta, This Is Going to Hurt*, physicians delve into the impacts and issues arising from many pressures on our health care system. These pressures include instability and stress from government funding changes and the year-long impasse with government without an agreement. Added to these is COVID and the cumulative effects on every Albertan.

Hosted by Drs. Howard Evans, Jon Hillner and Sam Myhr, guests of the podcast include community activists, academics, policy experts and patients who have been impacted by funding changes. Here are some recent episodes on issues that you may want to listen to.

### Opioid crisis

Dr. Hakique Virani, Associate Clinical Professor in the Department of Medicine at the University of Alberta and a specialist in public health and addictions, joins the podcast for part one of a two-episode discussion about Alberta's escalating opioid crisis.

Dr. Virani notes that opioid overdose deaths have become a new normal in Alberta and explains how the increase in opioid overdose deaths has been exacerbated by the pandemic. He explores the importance of supervised consumption sites in saving lives and how reducing those services at a time when we should be expanding them defies logic. He also discusses the inherent racism in current drug laws and the justice and human rights issues that must be addressed in conversations about decriminalization.

In part two, Dr. Virani explores what addiction means and why it's difficult to categorize addiction as a disease. He discusses society's aversion to differences and how criminal drug laws serve as a barrier to security, especially for many racialized and marginalized groups, who often emerge from incarceration at a higher risk of death from overdose. He also explains the importance of interventions such as Naloxone distribution and supervised consumption sites in saving lives.

### COVID-19 Alberta accomplishments, challenges and what return to normal may be

The podcast hosts interview Dr. Jia Hu, a Calgary-based public health and family physician who is currently involved in the primary care rollout of COVID-19 vaccines. Dr. Hu discusses how Alberta became a COVID hot spot – with some of the highest per capita new cases in the world – and what it will take to get us out of this situation. He touches on the strategies other jurisdictions have taken to bring numbers down – including lockdowns – and explores vaccine effectiveness and safety and the importance of addressing hesitancy. He also looks ahead and explains why he's optimistic that a return to normal is on the horizon.

## **Continuity of care: Value and opportunity**

Drs. Lee Green and Terry McDonald join the podcast for a discussion about the importance of the patient's medical home and the many benefits that come from continuity of care, including fewer emergency room visits. While virtual care is necessary and needed – especially during the pandemic – it works best when delivered by a physician who knows the patient and their medical history. They discuss the value of the relationship with your physicians/clinic and the impacts to health system costs when this relationship is absent.

Drs. Lee Green and Terry McDonald also touch on the growing shadow pandemic of mental health and how having a relationship with a physician can help patients open up about the stress they are experiencing.

To find the podcast, search for *Alberta, This Is Going to Hurt* on your preferred podcast platform.