



**Society of Rural Physicians of Canada**  
**Société de la médecine rurale du Canada**

## **Media Release**

### **Decreased Access to City Hospitals for Rural Southern Albertans**

JASPER March 5th, 2002 - The Calgary Regional Health Authority has attempted to address increasing pressure on its resources with a recently developed policy on accepting patients from other regions when the number of available hospital beds fall below certain levels. However, this now means that rural residents may be turned away from Calgary hospitals even if there are beds available.

"This policy", states the Dr. Jill Konkin of Jasper, President-elect of the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada, "highlights the declining access to services suffered by residents of rural Canada in recent years. Access to needed services has always been a challenge for residents in rural and remote locations of this country, but the balkanization of health care services in many provinces has increased the problems confronted by the 30% of Canadians who live in rural areas."

Recent restructuring has reduced the resources available for many rural communities to take care of their own while also reducing the access for citizens of these communities to needed care in urban centres.

Dr. David O'Neil, member of the SRPC Council from Trochu, said, "Calgary's regional referral policy demonstrates the need for a province wide process of accessing beds and specialist services which has a broader scope than the present critical care lines that have been developed in Edmonton and Calgary. This process should not only be, but must be seen to be fair to rural patients. Such a system would need to consider the needs of the patients, the resources available in the originating community and the nearest referral centre that can meet the needs of the patient."

Two key issues raised by this latest urban based policy are:

\* the disparities between the level of services available in urban areas and rural areas is further widened. The range of services provided in each region is not standardized.

Many rural regions do not have the resources nor the facilities to deliver many secondary level services nor most tertiary levels of care.

\* during the frequent times of province wide bed shortages, valuable time will be wasted as physicians in rural emergency departments try to find appropriate care for critically ill patients. Administrators are offloading their responsibilities to physicians.

"Wherever possible, the equipment, staff and facilities in rural communities need to be enhanced so that the demands on referral centres are minimized," states Dr. Jill Konkin. "Rural residents and their physicians are being put in an unsafe position--fewer resources locally and reduced access to needed resources elsewhere."

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#### **About the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada**

The Society of Rural Physicians of Canada (SRPC) is the national voice of Canadian rural physicians. Founded in 1992, the SRPC's mission is to provide leadership for rural physicians and to promote sustainable conditions and equitable health care for rural communities.

On behalf of its members and the Canadian public, SRPC performs a wide variety of functions, such as developing and advocating health delivery mechanisms, supporting rural doctors and communities in crisis, promoting and delivering rural medical education, encouraging and facilitating research into rural health issues, and fostering communication among rural physicians and other groups with an interest in rural health care.

The SRPC is a voluntary professional organization representing over 1,100 of Canada's rural physicians and comprising 5 regional divisions spanning the country

