

Specialist Services Committee Town Hall May 14, 2020

The Specialist Services Committee (SSC) hosted a town hall for Community Based Specialists to address issues, concerns, and questions relating to the current status of office practices, and the future ramping up of in-person care in community offices. This document provides a summary of the town hall meeting, which was attended by 57 specialists representing 19 sections.

Panelists included Dr Matthew Chow (Co-Chair, Specialists Services Committee) Dr Sam Bugis (VP of Physician Affairs & Specialty Practice, Doctors of BC) and Dr Frank Ervin (Head of Respiriology Division, Fraser Health). Guest speakers included Dr Heidi Oetter (Registrar and CEO) and Dr Derek Puddester (Deputy Registrar) from the College of Physicians & Surgeons of BC.

Dr Chow in his opening remarks acknowledged that specialists have been significantly affected by the pandemic through the cancellation of procedures, curtailed visits, and office closures. Specialists with community offices have faced additional, unique challenges.

Through multiple advocacy efforts by key individuals and organizations, the Ministry of Health (MOH) is increasingly aware of the needs and concerns of specialists with community offices. Dr Chow specifically recognized Dr Tommy Gerschman, Dr John Falconer, Dr Sam Bugis and Dr Kathy Lee for such efforts.

Dr Chow further clarified the purpose of the town hall was to share information and to hear the experiences and challenges of community specialists so that the SSC can continue to advocate for the specialists and their patients.

This was followed by an update from SSC staff about the pre-town hall survey from the participants that indicated a need for improvement regarding information sharing as over 50% responded they were not receiving any information related to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 practices. Participants also noted a marked variance of current PPE inventory, ranging from nothing, to upwards of a month's supply, as well as varying success in ordering PPE from traditional suppliers.

Dr Sam Bugis provided an update on PPE for specialists that included the following points:

- Doctors of BC has daily discussions with MOH and multiple partners including the Joint Collaborative Committees Co-Chairs, the Provincial VP of Medicine table, Dr Oetter & her colleagues at the College of Physicians and Surgeons.
- As of May 14, the indication is that there is a solid supply of PPE with the exception of gowns and N95 masks.
- Specialists have experienced frustration in securing a process for accessing PPE for community offices but appear to have obtained the contact information for each health authority. There is an awareness that working with some health authorities hasn't been very smooth and requested that participants alert the SSC should they encounter issues.
- Health Authority emails for ordering PPE are listed on [this link](#).

Guest Speakers Dr Heidi Oetter and Dr Puddester from the College of Physicians & Surgeons further addressed the participants highlighting the following points:

- The Provincial Health Office has been methodical in their assessment of the impact of COVID-19 needing to be certain that the number of COVID 19 patients were dropping and no signs of community spread existed.

- Dr Bonnie Henry has given the green light for seeing more patients face-to-face, however, it is important to understand that the “new normal” procedures of physical distancing, continuing to leverage virtual care, incorporating physical assessment and pre-screening to minimize risk of office contamination.
- Additional guidance from BCCDC and WorkSafeBC (released May 15).
- Reminder from WorkSafeBC that as employers, Doctors have an obligation to create safe environments for their staff.
- Be mindful of caring for yourself and accessing the Physician Health Program when in need.
- Check the college website (and others) frequently. For example an update has recently been posted for the telemedicine standard.
- Respectful reminder of patient confidentiality, especially with respect to COVID-19 test results and in what communities these are occurring.
- Current information is available through the joint [BCCDC and Ministry of Health website](#)

Dr Frank Ervin spoke about alternative ways to providing care highlighting the points below:

- Personally felt virtual care was a good alternative until adverse outcome with a patient that might have been different if an in-person assessment could have been coordinated.
- Started working with a pop-up clinic, coordinated by Ridge Meadows Family Practise Division, that facilitates in person care and physical assessments during the current period of uncertainty.
- Various specialists began working in this setting when specific patient scenarios warranted a physical examination.
- The pop-up clinic provides the full spectrum of needs (PPE, professional cleaning services).
- Main take away is that there are many good, new, innovative ways to provide care that have emerged from this crisis.

The post-meeting feedback indicated participant satisfaction. Here are some comments from the survey:

- Great Platform, efficient use of time
- The Q & A is a novel way of to share ideas, allowing for real time updates and questions
- Variety of speakers and perspectives were good
- Made us think about how to start opening up offices
- Practical, brought us up to date quickly
- Exploration of the relationship between Specialists & Health Authorities
- Modest & humble acknowledgement of naivety and learning process
- Sincere voices of leaders and doctors and health care available to answer difficult questions

Participant suggestions for future town halls included:

- Operational consideration for ramp up of practises (ie. patient flow, working with family members, staff safety)
- Compensation alternatives during COVID-19 (such as alternative payment plans versus fee for service, maintenance of telehealth, virtual care fees)