

News Release

July 21, 2009

Health Quality Council of Alberta announces findings and recommendations related to its inquiry of infection prevention and control (focusing on the re-use of single-use syringes) in the High Prairie Health Complex

(Calgary, AB) -- The Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) today released its findings and recommendations related to infection prevention and control and the practice of using the same syringe for administration of medications to multiple patients in the High Prairie Health Complex endoscopy suite and recovery room.

The Minister of Alberta Health and Wellness requested the HQCA to identify cause(s) and contributing factors that led to the practice of using the same single-use syringe for administration of medication to multiple patients and to develop recommendations to ensure these were addressed to improve future patient safety and health quality at the High Prairie Health Complex and Alberta Health Services – Peace Country Health. Under section 13 of the *Health Quality Council of Alberta Regulation*, the HQCA is legislated to conduct such inquiries into the quality and safety of patient services in the province.

In releasing the report, Dr. John Cowell, chief executive officer of the Council, said “The findings and recommendations were developed following a thorough process that included a root cause analysis (an investigative tool to perform a comprehensive, system-based review of critical incidents) and interviews that included individuals ranging from direct care providers to senior executives as well as physicians. The process also included a detailed review of relevant documents and an on-site review. The inquiry was conducted by a highly experienced and qualified investigative team. We believe the HQCA’s recommendations will result in a safer health system not only for citizens in High Prairie but for all Albertans.”

Key findings from the report include:

1. The use of a single syringe for administering intravenous medication to multiple patients was practiced in anesthesia in the early 1990s and perceived to support a similar nursing practice. This increased the likelihood that the practice of re-using the same single-use syringe for administering intravenous medications to multiple patients would continue in the endoscopy suite.


AND

Limited outside influences, external to the High Prairie Health Complex, contributed to the continued practice of re-using the same single-use syringe for administering intravenous medications to multiple patients in the endoscopy suite.

HQCA Recommendation:

- Provide a comprehensive orientation and ongoing education for all relevant health professionals, including roles and responsibilities, accountabilities and authority for clinical management and provision of endoscopy services.

Page 1 of 2

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2. The culture of autonomy present in the High Prairie Health Complex operating room and in the endoscopy suite isolated the operating room personnel and decreased the likelihood that the practice of re-using the same single-use syringe for administering intravenous medication to multiple patients would be recognized as being a departure from acceptable practice.

HQCA Recommendations:

- Implement a comprehensive, integrated regional endoscopy program, responsive to the needs of patients and Alberta Health Services – Peace Country Health, with a clearly defined structure, roles and responsibilities, authorities, reporting relationships and accountabilities for the clinical and administrative operations of the program.
 - Conduct an audit of the clinical practice use of all critical, single-use devices to ensure compliance to policy based on Alberta Health & Wellness Standards for Single-Use Devices (D2-2008) at all sites.
3. The culture of conformity in the operating room, supported by the value of conformity in surgical practices to ensure predictable outcomes, increased the likelihood that the practice of re-using the same single-use syringe for administering intravenous medication to multiple patients in the endoscopy suite would continue.

HQCA Recommendation:

- Regularly evaluate the clinical practices in the endoscopy suite and the recovery room against appropriate best practice indicators at all sites where relevant.

The report includes 11 contributing factors and over 30 additional recommendations that impact the High Prairie Health Complex, Alberta Health Services – Peace Country Health and Alberta Health and Wellness. The recommendations identify broad scope opportunities for improving system quality and safety with a focus on infection prevention and control practices regarding syringe use throughout the health care system.

“Our goal was not to lay blame on any one individual or organization but to look at system-wide issues and opportunities for improvement,” says Cowell. “We are confident the organizations involved have learned from the situation and will strengthen existing policies, processes and practices and introduce new ones based on this inquiry.”

“We expect the results of this inquiry will help inform the whole health system,” adds Cowell. “As an independent organization, the HQCA is committed to quality and safety improvement at the provincial level. We expect that the government, Alberta Health Services and the health professions will review the report and take the appropriate action as relevant within their area of responsibility.”

The findings have been presented to Alberta Health and Wellness. The Council conducted its inquiry from the point of view of the patient experience. Its recommendations are aimed at system-wide quality improvement based on the six dimensions of quality identified in the *Alberta Quality Matrix for Health*: Acceptability, accessibility, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency and safety.

For a copy of the report go to www.hqca.ca.

-30-

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