



Time to scrap unnecessary law

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One of the greatest documents ever written was the Magna Carta, the Great Charter of Freedoms, in 1215.

It bound King John of England to give rights to his subjects, whether they were free or fettered, and allowed prisoners the right to appeal unlawful imprisonment.

Historians agree this document was the cornerstone for constitutional and common law in the English-speaking world. Although many of its clauses were renewed in the Middle Ages, by the mid-1850s, most had been repealed.

Under Premier Ralph Klein's leadership, provincial legislators acknowledged Albertans cherish their publicly funded and administered health system.

Everyone -- from the government to doctors, nurses, technicians and therapists -- wanted to deliver efficient, timely and compassionate care to those in need.

With the noblest of intentions, the Alberta government passed the Health Care Protection Act (Bill 11) in 2004.

In essence, it prohibits the operation of private hospitals, bans the practice of queue-jumping and regulates the delivery of surgical services in hospitals and clinics.

The good news is surgical success rates rose for urgent procedures and several Alberta hospitals are now renowned for their heart, cancer and spinal operations, complemented with excellent patient care.

Meanwhile, the waiting lists for routine surgeries -- such as hip and knee replacements or cataract removals -- grew longer. It is a tragedy that sick Albertans and their families -- those most harmed by the lack of quick access to care -- must endure the delays.

Employers are burdened by the loss of skilled employees, away on disability.

As the complaints grew noisier, the government realized this was an unintended consequence of the act.

It rescinded the piece on private hospitals and allowed a number to become centres of excellence for certain, surgeries. All are paid by Alberta health care.

Wait times were dramatically reduced and patient satisfaction rates rose.

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce believes the Health Protection Act served the province well, but its best-before date has expired.



The legislation triples the regulatory bodies that oversee public and private surgical facilities -- Alberta Health Services (AHS), the College of Physicians and Surgeons (CPSA) and Alberta Health and Wellness (AH&W). Not only does this create a mountain of duplicated paperwork, but it also gave conflicting oversight to the three groups.

The following important articles should be saved if the Act is scrapped or replaced:

- Ensure all facilities, public or private (and paid by the public system), operate at the highest, most stringent conditions and all prioritize patient safety and well-being.
- Make Alberta Health Services and the College of Physicians and Surgeon accountable and responsible for the quality of patient care and safety, decreasing the need for ministerial authority over surgical facilities.
- Encourage competition between surgical units to promote technological and clinical innovation -- this will help attract private capital to purchase new diagnostic and treatment equipment (such as the prostate laser equipment at the Rockyview hospital).
- Order the majority of pharmaceuticals in bulk and buy seldom- prescribed drugs in units of 10 or less to save costs and prevent waste.
- Create a level playing field for all health providers distributing resources fairly and equitably.

Since the Magna Carta, governments have passed pieces of legislation.

By law, Alberta spends billions to deliver a quality health care to its citizens.

Smart legislators will eliminate unnecessary paperwork and focus precious resources to help the sick heal.

Isn't that what we all want?