



Flag-bearers for the 2022 Cardston Heritage Days Parade lead the procession on a sunny Southern Alberta day. Photo by Karen Smith.

Schow: A history of caring and innovation

Cardston has a rich history when it comes to innovation in health care. In fact, there has been some form of healthcare and healing going on in this area for hundreds of years. Practical nature-based healing used by First Nations to the latest in medical science

The more we learn about health and disease the more we need compassion and empathy. As discussed last week, healthcare is as important in rural communities as in urban areas.

Consider the following example of innovation, one that originated in our own community. An innovation triggered by devastating economic and societal pressures.

In 1929 the great depression struck Cardston and the rest of Canada. Soon after one of the two physicians in town relocated to a larger city.

Afraid that the town would lose its remaining doctor, citizens looked for solutions. There were many debates focused on “state medicine” and how to share the costs of medical fees. Without larger government-based programs available, local citizens worked to develop their own solutions.

This led to a ground-breaking plan that would foreshadow our current system. The “Cardston Medical Contract” established a voluntary pre-paid medical insurance program in 1932. Families paid a yearly fee for medical services in the hospital.

Within a few short years, hundreds of families signed up. New doctors were able to practice without losing money. The local hospital, developed by the community in 1919, was able to cover its costs and grow.

As population and health needs grew, Cardston found innovative ways to keep up. This includes working together to build a newer hospital. I’m confident that we will continue to work together to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Our current hospital opened in 1959. It was and still is a testament to the work of community members. It moved to Alberta Health Services when government health care became the norm. It is now the second oldest medical facility in the province.

The time has come to consider how we replace or do major renovations to this facility. I am certain that most community members feel as I do, that our hospital is a critical part of our community. While it continues to serve us well, there are updates that must happen to maintain that critical service.

That is why for the past few years I have worked with the Minister of Health to help them understand our needs. I am delighted to tell you that the Minister has approved a Business Case for a new Cardston Hospital.

What does that mean? This is the next step in the process. One that we have never taken before. The ministry has done a needs assessment to determine the project’s importance. By moving the project to a business case, the ministry agrees there is a real need for capital investment

But we’re still far from pushing this ball across the goal line, or through the hoop (this is Cardston after all). The better case we make, the better the chance we have of getting approved. Best case scenario is a new hospital. Or significant upgrades to the current facility.

To do that, I need to hear from the community. Your feedback and experience will help make the best case possible to the Ministry of Health. Community perspectives will go a long way towards getting the right outcome.

I can’t promise this will lead to a new hospital in Cardston. But together we can make a strong case for what we need to maintain local healthcare at the level we deserve.

That’s why I’m holding a special town hall in Cardston on Thursday August 11, 2022, at 7pm. Please schedule time to attend in person at the Tanner Senior Centre. All area residents should attend and share your perspectives and feedback.

There will also be a survey that follows the town hall. If you can’t show up in person, I urge you to watch for that survey and complete it. Let’s work together and continue the tradition of healthcare in Cardston and area.

Joseph Schow  
MLA, Cardston-Siksika

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