EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

‘Health: The North Research Project, Tuktoyaktuk’

To: Chief Mike Nolan, CCP(F), MA
Chief of Services, Renfrew County Paramedic Services

To be brought to the attention of
Minister of Indigenous Services Canada

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PRODUCED BY:

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Dear Mike and Pierre,

I remain grateful for your input and the opportunity to work with you regarding this important project. Given my recent consultations in Canada’s North, I felt it appropriate to bring to your attention one of the engagements which shows very pressing needs, capacity to manage and a motivation to move immediately forward in the area of Emergency Medical Services and Community Paramedicine. These are my recent findings respecting Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories which I believe require urgent attention.

To refresh, the recent national project Charter defines the objectives to be met as:

‘The Paramedic community along with various Federal government agencies supporting Indigenous communities, vulnerable populations, and their access to health services, have noted the need to adapt the national CSA Community Paramedicine Standard, Z1630, to meet the health access needs of remote/isolated and Indigenous communities. The questions remain:

a) What are the health service needs of remote and/or isolated Indigenous communities?
b) How can community paramedicine solve some of these gaps in service delivery, monitoring, and providing continuity of care/health promotion/illness prevention?
c) What would be the right approach in engaging Indigenous communities in this dialogue (e.g. cultural considerations)?
d) What would a community paramedicine program in remote and/or isolated and Indigenous communities look like?’

In pursuit of providing input to answers regarding these objectives, I have engaged government officials, Councils and communities across Canada’s North to gain their input. As might be anticipated, there are differences and similarities in primary care delivery across jurisdictions and certain locales have stood out in my consultative effort as requiring immediate service with knowledge of current and anticipated future needs.

Tuktoyaktuk (it looks like a caribou), is an Inuvialuit hamlet located in the Inuvik Region of the Northwest Territories, at the northern terminus of the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway (ITH). Commonly referred to simply by its first syllable, Tuk, the settlement lies north of the Arctic Circle on the shore of the Arctic Ocean and is the only community in Canada on the Arctic Ocean that is connected to the rest of Canada.
by road. With a population of 898 (2016 Census), Inuvialuit traditions remain strong with locals relying on caribou in the autumn, ducks and geese in both spring and autumn, and fishing year-round. Other activities include collecting driftwood, reindeer herding, and berry picking. Most wages today, however, come from tourism and transportation. With the recent opening of the ITH, visitors to this unique destination are expected to rise from a few hundred persons per year to over 10,000 annually.

Healthcare services are provided by the local Nursing Station with transfers to Inuvik, Yellowknife and other care centers as needs demand.

Gaps in primary care (the first point of contact with the healthcare system) are clear and cogent from my assessment. These include:

1. Lack of emergency response capacity within the community; there is no paramedic service to act as first responders and transport clients to the Nursing Station;
2. Absence of home-based care for post hospital discharge patients, the frail elderly and those who suffer from chronic disease, mental health and addictions issues;
3. Absence of communications and ground ambulance support for local and commercial on the Inuvik Tuktoyaktuk Highway. This was brought forcefully apparent through my witness of a potentially fatal motor vehicle accident where my (untrained) driver and I were the only first responders available to attend to assessment of clients involved who were already beginning to experience hypothermia; and,
4. Absence of communications and ground ambulance support for tourists who will travel on the Inuvik Tuktoyaktuk Highway. Being the only community in Canada connected to the Arctic Ocean by road, and a charming community as well, Tuktoyaktuk is expected to experience a boom in tourist travel through the ITH. Motor vehicle accidents will happen on the ITH in numbers not previously encountered prior; EMS response is a vital necessity.

I had the opportunity to engage with many community members in Tuktoyaktuk as well as present an approach at a public meeting of Hamlet Mayor and Council. As a result of these discussions, we reached a most fruitful consensus whereby I was entrusted to assist Tuktoyaktuk in providing solutions necessary to meet current and rapidly emerging needs. An agreement was drafted and has been signed by both the Hamlet and myself.

Providing solutions to Tuk’s needs requires a multi-stakeholder approach; to this end, the Hamlet is prepared locally to manage contracted services for the community as well as the ITH and potentially other communities in the Beaufort Delta as capacity evolves. In my experience with Community Paramedicine models and recent literature review performed for this project, my initial appraisal is that Renfrew County’s Ad Hoc Community Paramedicine model would serve community needs optimally when adapted to the Northern context in collaboration with local, territorial and national stakeholders.

To date, I am grateful for the national interest in this effort as part of the macro research on health in the North. As well, the participation and feedback from the Paramedicine Association of Canada remains a key success factor in understanding needs and contemplating solutions. I have had the pleasure of meeting with officials from the Government of Northwest Territories Departments of Health as well as Public Safety. They are highly resource constrained but are interested in this concept.
Tuktoyaktuk is a unique and strategic destination in Canada of national significance, of rapidly evolving accessibility with the recent opening of the ITH. Tuktoyaktuk is also predominately and traditionally an Aboriginal community. Concerned local stakeholders and southern counterparts have been engaged in a costing exercise to bring the needed services to Tuk and the Beaufort Delta on an expedient basis. It is critical that, especially given the clear lack of services and rapid escalation in demand, that all support and collaboration be given to this industrious Hamlet.

Sincerely,

Chris