

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River):

My question is for the Premier. Premier, the Medicor cancer clinic is a private, profit-driven operation opening today in Toronto. Its owners plan to charge patients an upfront fee of \$2,500 for an initial consultation and \$1,200 a month after that for ongoing care. Premier, this operation is in clear violation of the Canada Health Act and Ontario's Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act. It is another example of the two-tier health care that is happening in Ontario under the McGuinty government. My question is, what is your government going to do about Medicor?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Health. Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care):

It's interesting to hear the honourable member, the leader of the third party, today talking about the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, a bill that he and his party colleagues did not have the courage to support in this place. It was that we understood as a government the fundamental obligation to ensure the longevity of the public health care system through making sure that we had stronger mechanisms in place to prevent two-tier health care. The honourable member speaks about a clinic, an office that is open today. We have no knowledge at present that they yet have a client or patient. But I can assure the honourable member of this: The Ministry of Health is working so as to ensure that any clinic that proposes to charge a fee in exchange for access to an insured service, in other words, forcing people to pay a fee before an insured OHIP service can be provided, is in contravention of the Ontario law, and the appropriate actions, which include very, very significant penalties, are part and parcel of the solution.

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Mr. Hampton:

I asked the Premier what he was going to do; the Minister of Health says that he might act after the bank is robbed. Private clinics like Medicor drain desperately needed doctors and nurses away from our public health care system. They undermine the principle of universal access to health care. They usually take the easiest-to-treat cases, leaving the public health care system with the more expensive and difficult-to-treat patients. The result is that they make wait times for cancer patients even longer and they are difficult to curtail once you allow them to set up shop. Again, my question to the Premier is this: When will the McGuinty government act to stop buy-your-way-to-the-front-of-the-line health care in Ontario?

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Hon. Mr. Smitherman:

The honourable member arrives a little late to the debate, and then he arrives with all of his legal training lost to the discussion. This is the honourable member who now says that it's possible in the province of Ontario to arrest someone for saying that they're going to do something in the future. A clinic purportedly opened today. No evidence is brought to this subject except a story from a newspaper, no evidence that any client or any patient has been engaged there and no evidence that any fee has been exchanged there for a service. We put a strong law on the books, and this party voted against it. That law places strong penalties: prohibitions against the action of two-tier medicine and prohibitions against a charge in exchange for access to an insured service. I assure this honourable member, who did not have the courage to lead his party to support this legislation, that we understand our duties fundamentally. We are fundamentally in favour of a universally accessible public health care system, and we will take the appropriate action in response to the threat of this clinic and any other that occurs.

Mr. Hampton:

The McGuinty government says it stands for medicare. We're asking the McGuinty government to finally take some steps to prevent two-tier health care, something you are so obviously reluctant to do. Medicor says, "We also explore options for treatments -- not routinely available to you -- and will coordinate such care if you wish." In other words, those who can pay extra will get preferential access to medical services. Paying your way to the front of the line contradicts the Canada Health Act. Paying for intake services and medical records and turning away patients who can't or won't pay block fees are also illegal under Ontario law and Canadian law. The question is, is the McGuinty government simply going to lecture people or are you actually going to do something to prevent two-tier health care in Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman:

Now today I get a lecture on lecturing from the lecturer. This honourable member in his first question asked, "Why don't you vigorously apply the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, a bill that we oppose?" By his third question, he asked, "What are you going to do about the fact that you don't have strong enough laws to address this?" This is the inconsistency that comes from the honourable member.

Fundamentally, on the issue of cancer, here are the results that we've produced: cancer radiation waits are down 16% from 2004 to 2005; province-wide cancer surgery waits are down 4.3%. We believe fundamentally in investments in the public health care system, and we've acted to place a very strong law on the books of the province of Ontario, with very strong penalties, which this honourable member voted against.

I say to anyone that seeks to operate in this fashion in the province of Ontario that we will take all of the action possible within our laws and pursue other measures as required in order to ensure that patients in Ontario have equitable access to these services.