

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 159-18(2): PRESCRIPTION DRUG MONITORING PROGRAM

June 3 , 2016

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Can the Minister tell us the status of the development of the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program and when we might expect to see a recommendation that could be shared with the Social Development Committee? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have developed a steering committee, as the Member mentioned in her Member's Statement, to review options around prescription drug monitoring, and we've asked them to come back with recommendations on best approaches that would be appropriate here in the Northwest Territories. We do know that the most effective monitoring method needs to be consistent with the Department's emerging suite of e-Health tools, such as electronic medical records. At this time, there have not been any final recommendations provided by the committee on how to improve or implement a Prescription Drug Monitoring Program. However, it is still our intent, and we are still moving forward with that work to help curb prescription drug abuse here in the Northwest Territories and help us advance the design of a monitoring program. However, given our current fiscal environment, it's not possible to state with any certainty when this will be able to move forward, but we are committed to moving forward and we are committed to getting that work done. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: Thanks to the Minister for that answer. I appreciate that the electronic component is a significant dimension of this program. Can the Minister give us a brief description of how the linkage to the pharmacies across the Territory would be achieved and how we will partner with the pharmacists in ensuring that the system works across the Territory? So to have their buy-in, not just the technology.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: As I indicated, at this time we don't actually have any recommendations from the committee. The membership on that steering committee does include the NWT Pharmacy Association, and we already collaborate with pharmacists across the Territories on a number of initiatives. They are a critical and a key component to making this a reality here in the Northwest Territories. We will continue to consult and work in collaboration with the pharmacies across the Northwest Territories to ensure that a program, when it is put in place, is both effective, efficient, and responsive to the needs of both clinicians, pharmacists, and most importantly the patients.

MS. GREEN: Mr. Minister, this question has to do with the project rolling forward. Obviously there will be a presentation of plans when those are available, and I'm wondering if there's any chance we can see them in the coming year's budget.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: The budget is before the House. We are going through the budget. Hopefully we'll do Health and Social Services in the next couple of days. There is no money for the implementation of a Prescription Drug Monitoring Program in this budget, but we do have the steering committee. We do fund the work they're doing within existing resources, and that work is going to continue. We are still moving forward; we are still quantifying what a

Prescription Drug Monitoring Program will cost. We are looking at how to incorporate e-Health and electronic medical records, and we are working with pharmacies to find out how we're going to make that linkage with them to make sure that the information is readily available but not contravening things like the Health Information Act.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. My last question deals with amalgamating this initiative into the work of the new single territorial board. Can the Minister comment on whether, and how, the creation of the new board will affect delivery of the electronic medical records system? Thank you.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Moving to a single authority should actually help us move this forward in a quicker manner because we will be able to work as a system as opposed to a fragmented group of authorities. With respect to planning for the system-wide EMR, it began years ago and implementation is well under way. Four authorities are currently using the EMR, representing a significant portion of the NWT populations; that's Yellowknife, Hay River, and Fort Smith, and system-wide resources have already been identified to help move that forward. We are hoping in 2016-17 to bring the Tulita, Sahtu, Deh Cho, and Beaufort Delta in as well.

This is a huge step for us and this is an ability for those involved in a circle of care of individuals to actually see the records, so that individuals will know what has been prescribed for an individual as long as they are in the circle of care so that they don't over-prescribe. It doesn't link in the pharmacies, which is a key component of the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program. That is something that we need to do as well, and as I've indicated, the steering committee is going to provide us advice and guidance on that. We will cost it out, and we are working closely with the Pharmacy Association. Unfortunately, as I've said, given our current fiscal environment, I'm not in a position where I can actually say when we will be able to roll that out. Needless to say, though, we are still doing the work so that we can have a business case to present and discuss when appropriate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.