

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 458-18(2): HOME CARE SUPPORT WORKER VISITS

October 14, 2016

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. At a recent constituency meeting homecare services were the main topic of conversation, and devoted users of the service in Yellowknife reported to me that their homecare support worker visits had dropped from the past frequency of weekly to as infrequently as once every two or three weeks. This doesn't speak very well for the preservation of this service or the enhancement either. Can the Minister explain to me why these reductions in service are taking place? I'll start with that, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, homecare services that are provided to individuals are based on clinical need or direction from a physician on the types of services that an individual will require. Conceivably, those can change over time. Without knowing the details of the individual case, I certainly can't answer why one individual might have a reduction in their services. I would encourage the individual who has had the reduction to talk to their practitioner to see what can be done and whether or not the homecare that's provided is meeting the clinical needs of the patient. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for that answer. It was more than one person, and the frequency seems to be decreasing. All these particular constituents of course are aging. So I'm wondering if this drying up of services is a permanent situation or is it simply a matter of staffing?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Mr. Speaker, we have made no financial reductions in the area of homecare in the Government of the Northwest Territories. It's conceivable that we do have some staffing changes from time to time that may have a temporary impact. But I come back to my original statement, at the end of the day the homecare that's provided to an individual is based on clinical needs, those clinical needs can change. I would encourage the patients to deal with their practitioners to ensure that they're getting the level of support they need to ensure that they're meeting their clinical needs.

Mr. Speaker, we are also working on the continuing care review that's going to help us identify where our resource is being spent, is it being spent appropriately, are we getting maximum bang for our buck, and do we need to look at additional resources over the long-term recognizing that we do have an aging population? But I do encourage the Member to have her constituents talk to the practitioners to see why their level of care has changed. It may be a clinical requirement or a clinical need that's being met. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I'm glad the Minister referenced the work on the continuing care plan. My understanding from the responses that were given to my colleague, the Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh, yesterday is that the plan will not be available until the end of the current fiscal year, and so I'm wondering, then, when funding would come into place to put that plan into

operation because, if it's not in the current business plans, then the wait could be up to 18 months.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Mr. Speaker, when spending public funds, it's important that we make sure that we're spending funds effectively, getting bang for buck, that we're getting maximum benefit for every penny that we spend. We need to look at how we're spending the dollars today. We need to make sure that we're spending them appropriately. If possible, we need to re-profile our funds within the existing home care services to make sure that we are getting those benefits.

I can't say when we would be asking for additional funds because I don't know what degree or amount of funds are needed at this point. The normal process would be we will have something done here at the end of the fiscal year, as I've committed and promised; we'll have an opportunity to have discussions with Members through the next business planning process; and, if money is required, hopefully, we can build it into the mains for the following fiscal year.

Urgency sometimes expedites those processes. There are steps and opportunity, but we're unprepared to make some decisions on that until we have the data and the information we need to help everybody in this building make evidence-based decisions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say I'm aware about evidence-based decisions. The evidence at this point shows that our population is aging and the need for home care is just getting greater and greater, so I just can't get my head around the idea that there could be a delay of 18 months in finding new or re-profiling existing funding to meet the needs of people who want to age in place. I guess I'm looking for the Minister to make a commitment that there will in fact be a response to this plan by attaching money to it sooner than 18 months. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Mr. Speaker, I mean, I've said it once, I'll say it again: until we do the analysis, we won't know if we are spending our money wisely and effectively. We might actually be able to get significant benefits for our residents with the existing money if we change the way that we're doing business. I think this is practical and responsible. The Member is absolutely correct, we have an aging population here in the Northwest Territories, and there are some more demands. Does it require more money? Does it require us to change the way that we're providing home care services and re-profiling money from other areas to help us enhance what we're doing in home care?

Mr. Speaker, we need the data. We need the information. I will absolutely commit to sharing that with Members. If there's an opportunity to expedite, we're certainly looking at that, but we need the data. I need to share it with Members. We need to have a discussion on how we want to move forward together. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.