

## ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

### QUESTION 133-18(3): CHEMOTHERAPY SERVICES AT STANTON HOSPITAL

February 20, 2018

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are once again for the Minister of Health and Social Services. MLAs received notice in December that chemotherapy services had been suspended at Stanton Hospital and, until their resumption, patients would receive their treatment at the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton. Can the Minister give us the current status on when chemotherapy will be resumed in Yellowknife? Mahsi.

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

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Member for the question. I appreciate the frustration that residents of the Northwest Territories who are receiving their cancer treatment at Stanton are experiencing, and obviously we want to make sure we're providing the best care that we can to these individuals.

Since we've moved to a single authority, we are conducting reviews of our programs and services to make sure that we are providing a high-standard, best service that we can. In the review of the cancer services that are provided here in Yellowknife—and just a reminder to all Members that we have a lot of individuals in the Northwest Territories who are receiving cancer, including chemo, treatment in the South due to the particular cancers that they have—we aren't able to provide cancer and chemo treatment to all residents of the Northwest Territories.

For the services that were provided here, there was an assessment done. It was determined that there are areas for a clear improvement in the cancer treatment that we do provide. We did choose to shut down the chemo services temporarily so that we can conduct modern training and get the staff all up to date with the best training. That included an online component, but also a practicum or a mentorship in Alberta on-site, so our staff did have to leave the Northwest Territories.

We've also recognized that this is an opportunity for us to update some of our equipment, which is one of the reasons that the delay is a little longer than we had hoped for. We're hoping, and I think I provided an update to the Members, that we're looking at four to eight more weeks before we can go live. I think we owe it to our residents who can receive this type of treatment to provide them with the best quality treatment we can. We're hoping we're be up and running in four to eight weeks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. GREEN:** I thank the Minister for the detail he was able to provide there. Could the Minister now specify what kinds of knowledge or skill deficiencies were found to be in need of correction?

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** As I indicated, since we've moved to a single authority, it's given us a real opportunity to look at things at a territory-wide level and make sure that our residents are receiving top-quality services.

When the review was done of the chemo program in Yellowknife, and once again recognizing that it didn't provide chemo to all of our residents who needed treatment, it was determined that there was an opportunity to provide more current training. This field is changing constantly and we need to make sure that our staff are up-to-date all the time, which means we need to have a solid program in there to ensure that the training is ongoing.

I always felt at the time that we could do better, that we needed to provide more timely training to our practitioners and we needed to make sure that they had adequate back-up when they are away getting that training so that we don't have a gap in service. We're doing that work now.

We're also taking the opportunity to upgrade some of our equipment so that, when those patients do come back, or future patients do come to us, we get the same kind of feedback that we're getting now, which is that the service that they're receiving at the Cross in Alberta is amazing, it's state-of-the-art and really great. We want to be able to provide, at a minimum, what they're providing at the Cross in Edmonton, for the services that we do provide here.

**MS. GREEN:** I thank the Minister for his answer. I think any of us would want our loved ones to report that they had received amazing service for chemotherapy, wherever it is provided. Moving on now to references to policies that need review: can the Minister elaborate on what gaps or deficiencies in policy were identified and what steps are being taken to address these deficiencies?

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** I do not have that detail in front of me at my fingertips today, but I will commit to getting the Members some additional update on what is occurring in the chemo unit here in Yellowknife, and when we hope to be up and running.

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

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that commitment from the Minister. My final question is whether he can anticipate additional closures being necessary for training and equipment upgrading going forward? Thank you.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** One of the things that has become available to us as a territorial health system since we have moved to a single system is that we have the opportunity to look at our systems across the territories. We are conducting reviews of many of our programs, whether they are programs at Stanton or whether they are programs that stretch across the territory as a whole. I anticipate, and I think it is fair to anticipate, that we are going to find areas where we need to make significant improvements in the provision of healthcare here in the Northwest Territories. I hope that does not mean that we have closures in many of our areas, but I think we should be prepared that we may have to do temporary closures to some of our units in some of our areas in order to ensure that we have the time to bring our services up to the highest standards that we possibly can. I cannot say what those areas are, but we are digging into the provision of services across the territory, and there is, I think, I chance that we may have to temporarily suspend or modify delivery for short periods of time as

we bring these program improvements into place so that we can have the best care, the best health, and the best services for the people of the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.