

JULIE GREEN—MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
Quality Assurance and Complaint Processes
Committee of the Whole—2018-2019 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Health and Social Services—February 28, 2018

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, when we spoke about the business plan for this department during the business plan meetings in November, there was some discussion about quality assurance and the potential of making a division of quality assurance within the department. Could the Minister please update us on the progress towards this action? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we don't have a quality assurance division in the department, and I suppose I will need the Member to remind me. I remember talking about quality assurance in the Territorial Health and Social Services Authority who is there at the frontline level to take input from residents who have concerns so that they can explore those and make improvements. I am certainly open to have the Member remind me if that is otherwise, but it has always been clear in my mind that we had been talking about the Territorial Healthy Authority.

Now, with that in mind, we do have positions in the Territorial Authority. We are working to have a centralized sort of support to that, i.e. a director or something along those lines who can provide some oversight at a territorial level, but we also need to make sure that we continue to have those supports at a regional level within the Territorial Authority to make sure that those are available to residents when they do have concerns.

The department itself as we continue to strengthen the single authority model will be more of a ministry as opposed to a program delivery, so there is going to be some role as far as writing policies, procedures, regulations, but not so much as far as monitoring the day-to-day quality. That would be the Territorial Authority.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, and I just ask the Minister and witnesses to indicate when you are finished talking so that our tech team knows when to change the microphones. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, according to the notes that I took at the time, there is a need for greater clarity of roles between the department and the authority, so this would seem to be on point to the discussion we are having now. How does quality assurance in the department relate to quality assurance at the front line? Who is driving the bus there? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, in the department, we have a number of different functions, including our policy division. We've got nursing consultants. We've got the chief public health officer. We have a number of responsibilities that are responsible for developing policy related to particular activities,

such as nursing or midwifery and those types of things. When operationalized, those are operationalized through the Territorial Health and Social Services Authority and our two other partner boards. The quality assurance that I have been referencing is quality assurance at the authority level, which is responsible for taking any complaints or concerns from a resident and investigating those concerns and making recommendations on the operations to ensure that these incidents, as they occur, do not occur again.

We do have to have, and we do have a close relationship between the authority and the department. When the department is working on policy, territorial-wide policy, they absolutely engage frontline providers and staff within the authority who can provide information and help on the design because, bottom line, they are front-line providers. As far as quality assurance, I mean, there are many different ways of looking at that. We do collect data so that we can make evidence-based decisions. Much of that data come into the department for analysis so that we can all, in this room, in this building, as well as in the department, work to make evidence-based decisions.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. I just ask when you're done talking, just to mention it. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I wonder, then, for example, how audits work in this process. Is there going to be a regime of regular audits based on the quality assurance policies? How broad are these policies going to be? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Recognizing that there are so many different program areas within the Department of Health and Social Services, with respect to new programs or amendments to programs in the future, program designs will often occur in the department where standards will be set that must be evaluated and monitored over time as part of the evaluation framework which we hope and intend to put into place with respect to programs we are putting forward. The authorities will be the authority, and our two partner authorities will still be required to collect the data and make sure that the data is being compiled on a regular basis and funnelled up so that it can reported on in this House and in other venues.

As far as individual audit goes, for instance, the Child and Family Services, as an example, the individual audits will be done by the authority with support from the -- sorry, it is the other way around. It will be done by the department with support from the authority and the appropriate regions because they are the front-line individuals with the data. It has to be collected in partnership.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, there was also some discussion during the business planning about a new formal mechanism to deal with complaints. Can the Minister update us on that? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Once again, my memory of that

particular conversation is around what we wanted to do in the individual authorities so that individuals have an opportunity to provide or register their concerns in the Territorial Authorities, so it can be reviewed by our quality assurance staff and so that recommendations can be made for improvements.

Now, having said that, there are also other venues for our residents to make complaints. For instance, if a resident has a concern about a physician, there is a formal mechanism for residents to make complaints about physicians. If a resident wants to make a complaint about a particular practitioner and their performance, there are mechanisms by which, through licensing bodies or others, an individual can make a complaint about an individual professional. If it comes to system concerns or process systems or process concerns in a health centre or a hospital, that is where we would really like them to engage our quality assurance people.

In some of our authorities previously, those quality assurances were also patient representatives, and we are trying to separate those two a little bit, so that a patient representative is there to provide guidance and support through the system, and we have quality assurance who can take complaints and investigate and find improvements, so we're trying to separate those a little bit and have them as sort of two different things, recognizing that they obviously have to work hand in hand from time to time. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I will just finish this section with a comment, and the comment is that I recognize that there is a difference between the department and the authority, and that the two are defining their roles and their relationship to one another. When it comes to this business plan, we only have the opportunity to talk to and have accountability with the department, so there is a missing link here with accountability with the authority. There needs to be some consideration given about how we as Regular Members provide oversight of the authority as the largest entity funded by the department. I just leave that as a comment. I don't know that there is a plan now, but in the future, we are going to need either to have the department answer on behalf of the authority, or have the authority here themselves. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister, would you like to respond?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That already exists according to the legislation for the authorities. the Ministry of Health and Social Services is responsible and accountable for provision of services through the Territorial Health Authority, and they do that through a board which the Minister appoints. I certainly take recommendations from others on the membership. Ultimately, this budget before you does have a significant amount of money that is flowing to the authority, so I would suggest that, if you have questions that are specific to the authority throughout the document, there are areas that are clearly flowing money to the authority, I think this is the appropriate venue to have the discussion about some of those things. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

