

PALLIATIVE CARE BENEFITS PROGRAM

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

It has recently come to my attention that the GNWT does not offer a palliative care benefits program for Northern residents who have been declared or diagnosed palliative by their Physician. Palliative patients are those patients who have reached the end stage of a life-threatening disease or illness and require a variety of medications in order maintain their comfort and control pain during the last stages of their illness.

Currently, Northern residents who have been diagnosed as palliative may be covered through the G.N.W.T.'s Extended Health Care Benefits program. This is a good program and provides coverage for Northern residents for a wide variety of conditions, including palliative care patients.

Unfortunately, it is limited when it comes to palliative patients. Many of the medications palliative patients require for management of pain are not automatically benefits under the Extended Care Program. These required medications can be added as a benefit for the patient; however, the application process can be quite long. The net result is that palliative patients will either have to go without comfort managing prescriptions until they receive approval from the Extended Health Benefits program or pay out of their own pockets until they can be reimbursed once their Extended Health application for the prescribed medication is approved.

This seems unreasonable. Palliative patients should not have to wait for care that will allow them to live their remaining days in comfort and as they choose.

Most southern jurisdiction already have palliative care benefits programs which are expedited in order to reduce the wait times for palliative patients. For example, Albertan's are guaranteed a 16 to 24 hour turn around time for approval. and they often provide them immediately.

Residents of the N.W.T. who have been diagnosed as palliative deserve more than the wait times they currently face. As a government we need to ensure that no additional barriers are placed on the care and comfort and pain management of these individuals during their last days. We need a palliative care benefits program.

Mr. Speaker, later this afternoon I will be asking the Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services questions concerning a palliative care benefits program for residents of the NWT.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.