

DENTAL SURGERY SERVICES IN THE NWT

Mr. Speaker,

On Tuesday the member from Tu Nedhe asked the Minister responsible for Health and Social Services some questions concerning Dental Surgery Services.

I was disappointed to hear that dental surgery services have been discontinued and will not be offered in any health service facilities in the NWT. This decision is causing prolonged pain and suffering for young kids throughout the NWT.

According to the un-edited Hansard from Wednesday, June 11, Minister Lee indicated:

“We feel that there is room for us to negotiate, because the dentists are getting most of the coverage for providing that service or are compensated for that. We also feel that the federal government should step into covering the dental surgery costs, because it is a question of long-term oral health of our residents. I am investigating this, and I'm looking at the possibility of making this service available in either Hay River Hospital, where there is room for that, but probably not in Stanton, because they are fully occupied.”

Although I'm very pleased to hear that the Minister is investigating the possibility of making services available I do have a couple of concerns with her statement.

First, the oral surgeons are paid for procedures based on a set fee structure. As a result, they are paid exactly the same for the same procedure whether it is performed in their clinic or an operating room within a health facility. Expecting the oral surgeons to take a pay cut, from this fee structure, because they are performing a procedure on a child in a health facility is unreasonable. The pain and suffering of children should never be used as a bargaining chip.

Second, I don't understand why Stanton Territorial Hospital won't be considered. Dental procedures have been performed there in the past. I had all four wisdom teeth removed at Stanton when I was a kid. Stanton often keeps on OR room open. They have also, traditionally, closed the OR room for the majority of the summer breaks. In the best interest of the children I believe room can be found within the schedule at Stanton as well as the Hay River Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, I do agree with the Minister that the Federal Government should step in and pay the costs that they are responsible for. I encourage the Minister to continue her efforts in this area. There are approximately 430 – 130 in the South Slave, 300 in the rest of the Territories -- young children waiting for oral surgery. They are prioritized based on pain. Because of this government's concern about whether or not dentists take a pay cut to perform surgery in GNWT facilities this number is increasing daily and northern children continue to be in pain. If a child waits too long, damage to their teeth can reach a point of no return resulting in permanent gum, bone and tooth damage -- something that will last them a lifetime.

Is this pain and suffering this government is inflicting on these children really worth the couple dollars that the Minister is demanding out of the oral surgeons and the feds are refusing to pay? I don't think so.

Currently, these suffering children out to southern institutions to have their oral surgery completed. This is increasing the waiting list, costing the GNWT additional money -- probably a lot less than performing the surgery in the NWT -- and does not contribute to the economy of the NWT. I believe that if the Minister were to complete a full cost accounting analysis on this issue she would find that the best solution, financially and practically, would be to re-open the operating rooms in both Yellowknife and Hay River to local Oral Surgeons. Let's get this waiting list down now and save these children months and years of pain and suffering.

Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time I will be asking the Minister responsible for Health and Social Services some questions on this issue.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.