

PALLIATIVE CARE BENEFITS PROGRAM

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In February 2008 I asked the Minister responsible for Health and Social Services some questions about the palliative care drug approval process for residents of the Northwest Territories who have been diagnosed as palliative. In April, the Minister sent me a letter indicating that the Department is taking steps to simplify the process for approving coverage of palliative care drugs and that a process would be in place by this past summer.

Last week when I asked the Minister to provide me with an update she indicated, according to the unedited hansard of October 9, 2008 that “we have a process now where as long as the doctor says in the application for medication to Green Shield or whoever is administrating our health insurance that it’s palliative care, Green Sheild, has been processing the documents on a 24-hour turnaround basis.”

This is great. Unfortunately, it is not consistent with the way that it’s actually working on the front lines. Both before and after I asked my questions to the Minister last week I checked with a number of Pharmacists to see how the implementation was proceeding and whether or not palliative patients were experiencing quicker turnaround times.

None of the Pharmacists I talked with have received notification that there were or are new processes in place related to Palliative Care Patients. All of them were able to identify recent situations where Palliative Care Patients are experiencing delays in obtaining their much needed Palliative Care medications. Based on this I don't understand how the Minister can state, as she did in the unedited Hansard of October 9, 2008 that "it's working really well".

During the May/June session I asked the Minister to work with the Pharmacists in the NWT on developing and implementing a process that would help palliative care patients. I believe that, for the benefit of their patients, they would still like to have input and help the government streamline these processes.

Residents of the NWT who have been declared Palliative need to be treated with dignity and respect and should not be forced to wait for much needed pain management medications due to the overly bureaucratic process and procedures of the Department of Health and Social Service.

Mr. Speaker, later this afternoon I will be asking the Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services questions concerning these new palliative care benefits processes and procedures and I will be seeking the Ministers commitment to work with NWT Pharmacists, the front line providers of any system put in place by the Department, to ensure they are engaged and that Palliative Patients are not waiting for their required medications.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.