

Minister asked to ban medical tourism

Open letter from Ontario's RNs, health centres and midwives calls on Minister of Health Eric Hoskins to immediately ban medical tourism;

As health service providers committed to our not-for-profit, publicly funded health system, this joint letter urges you to immediately ban inbound medical tourism in Ontario.

As we wrote to Premier Wynne on April 11, 2014, we are dismayed by the provincial government's inaction to stop instances of medical tourism.

Toronto's University Health Network has raised millions of dollars by seeking international patients on a referral basis. Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre then raised the stakes in marketing their health services to other countries and effectively declaring that they were 'open for business' according to their chief administrative officer, Michael Young.

Our three main concerns are:

Medical tourism represents a shift to for-profit, private health care. Health care in Canada is rooted in the notion of accessing services based on need, not on one's ability to pay.

Creating a second tier contravenes the principles of Medicare, and also establishes a precedent for those who can pay to access care ahead of others.

This in turn, sets the stage for vulnerable and/or wealthy Canadians to ask why they aren't able to pay for care in a Canadian hospital.

'Unused capacity' should be available to treat Canadians, especially those on waiting lists for procedures and services. If hospitals have excess capacity or there is a surplus of physicians, nurses and other staff -- why aren't provincial and federal governments working together to ensure better use of these resources to reduce waiting times?

As we learned from the ORNGE scandal, diverting attention from a core mission of providing health services to one that seeks to generate income from international clients is fraught with dangers, including corruption.

Profit-seeking health care makes the entire system more expensive. The most market-driven example, the United States, spent the most of any OECD country in 2011 with 17.9 per cent of its GDP going to health-care expenditures compared with 11.2 per cent for Canada and the OECD average of 9.3 per cent.

For-profit health care in hospitals costs more and results in higher risks for patient mortality compared with not-for-profit hospitals.

Allowing for-profit health care that is more expensive, less equitable, less effective, and that results in worse health outcomes is not in the best interests of Ontario's health-care system.

Minister Hoskins, we urge you to ban for-profit hospital care targeted to patients arriving from outside of Canada based on ability to pay.

We look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

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