

news release

June 29, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Copeman Clinic: Health Coalition questions Medical Services Commission's ability to protect patients from illegal user charges

FOI reveals that auditors failed to verify Copeman's claims that there was no preferential treatment at its member-only primary care clinic.

The BC Health Coalition is calling for an inquiry into the provincial government's ability to ensure that patients get fair access to physician services after it was discovered the Medical Services Commission (MSC) did not perform a test of access during its 2007 audit of Vancouver's Copeman Healthcare Centre.

Copeman charges patients an up-front access fee of \$3,900 that allows for preferred access to medical practitioners working there. Most of these practitioners also bill the public health insurance plan for their services while only seeing patients who are members of the exclusive clinic.

"The information that we received through FOI confirms our worst suspicions: the very body that is responsible for ensuring that all B.C. residents have the kind of equal access to medical care required under our health care laws, appears unwilling or unable to protect that access," says BCHC co-chair Rachel Tutte.

The BCHC filed the FOI requests after its calls for the public release of the audit findings and requests for meetings with the MSC were denied.

It found that the audit's test of access simply referenced Copeman's written policy stating no preferential access to its physicians and no charges for access to insured services. "The auditors did not phone or try to book an appointment as the audit methodology was both appropriate and sufficient to determine if the Copeman Healthcare Centre was extra-billing," writes an MSC auditor, indicating that no attempt was made to verify that the policies were actually followed.

Auditors even failed to speak with patients who had notified the Commission that they had been denied access because they were unwilling or unable to pay Copeman's fees. "What do the auditors have to say to the patients who were told by Copeman staff that they would not be able to see a doctor working there without first paying a membership fee?" asked Tutte.

"We have lost confidence in the ability of the MSC to act on complaints filed by patients to effectively enforce the Medicare Protection Act," says Tutte.

"Our provincial government has a responsibility to enforce our health care laws. We are asking the people of BC to join us in calling for a provincial inquiry into the ability of the MSC to enforce them."

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