



Health Coalition demands Campbell government investigate latest allegations of illegal billing

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The BC Health Coalition is urging the provincial government to investigate recent charges by a Kelowna surgeon that private surgical companies are illegally billing patients for publicly insured cataract surgeries across the province.

In a March 24th letter to the Health Minister, Dr. Francois Theriault cited a BC College of Physicians and Surgeons report that 4,482 cataract extractions were performed in 11 private surgical suites in B.C. during 2007. Dr. Theriault stated that he has no knowledge of any Health Authority contracts with private clinics for the provision of cataract extractions, and noted that it is common for patients to pay an average of \$1000 per eye for the procedure ... even though it is covered under B.C.s Medical Services Plan.

Dr. Theriault first raised the issue with Hospital and Health Authority officials four years ago, and it was eventually referred to the Health Ministry and the Medical Services Commission (MSC) in the fall of 2007. The MSC has since refused to respond.

-The allegations made by Dr. Theriault are troubling on their own, but the apparent stalling by the MSC is totally unacceptable," said BC Health Coalition researcher Colleen Fuller.

-These allegations are among many that have been made about private surgical clinics, yet the minister and the MSC have failed to respond either appropriately or in a timely fashion."

The transparency of past MSC investigations, including its findings and conclusions, have recently been a subject of question by the general public. However, Fuller noted that last month the government introduced new regulations designed to make the MSC more transparent. She said that she believes an investigation of Dr Theriaults allegations should be undertaken promptly and that its findings will be made public.

-We urge the provincial government to release the complete details of MSC investigations and rationale used to support its conclusions so that the public can understand how the government is or is not enforcing the law," said Fuller.

-The BC government must invest in the proven public health care solutions that protect equality, access, fairness and efficiency in our public health system," added Fuller.

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