



# New B.C. health minister off base on for-profit care

March 17, 2011

Advocates working to protect B.C.'s universal public health care system are troubled by recent statements made by newly-appointed health minister Mike de Jong, hinting at a bigger role for the private sector in health care delivery.

Speaking to media during his first day on the job, de Jong argued that patients do not care who owns the health care facility or employs the workers when they receive care.

"The minister's comments demonstrate that he is out of step with the wishes of British Columbians," says BC Health Coalition Co-chair Rachel Tutte. "It does matter who owns the facilities where we receive care. The for-profit investor-owned surgical and diagnostic clinics to which the minister refers are an increasing and serious threat to the financial stability of our health care system—and there is clear evidence that they cost more than public facilities and increase wait times in the public system by drawing away scarce health professionals."

B.C. leads the country in the growth of privately owned for-profit clinics, and billing patients out-of-pocket for insured services ... a clear violation of the Canada Health Act ... has now become commonplace.

"Minister de Jong must recognize that Medicare is under attack in B.C. and assure British Columbians that as health minister, his priority is to protect it," says Tutte. "For-profit health facilities are expanding in B.C. and jeopardizing the equality and fairness of our health care system," she adds, referring to research conducted by the BC Health Coalition showing evidence that for-profit clinics across the province continue to openly charge patients additional fees for health services already covered by Medicare.

The BCHC has gathered two thousand letters from patients across B.C. demanding that the province take immediate measures to protect public health care by establishing a moratorium on the expansion and funding of private, for-profit surgical and diagnostic clinics, and instead promote publicly funded and administered outpatient facilities.

"We have offered to meet with Mr. de Jong and discuss the sustainability of an equitable and accessible public health care system for generations to come," says Tutte.

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