



Senior Healthcare Perspective

Alberta Health Act – A privatization plan?

The membership of the Alberta Seniors United Now (SUN) strongly supports a publicly funded and publicly monitored health care system that is accessible and able to respond to the health care needs of all Albertans.

The Government of Alberta has passed into law a new Alberta Health Act. SUN is not opposed to this act. We support all legislation that is based on principles provided that they are clear and meaningful principles. A meaningful principle might be one that extended the scope of insured services under the Canada Health Act to cover all medically necessary services, as determined by a doctor, regardless of the venue in which a service is delivered. As seniors we would want a principle that states that both medical and nursing care required by seniors, who are cognitively impaired, chronically ill or profoundly frail, is a medically necessary service that should be fully insured.

The new Alberta Health Act does not address this principle. It is too ambiguous and vague to reassure seniors that the Provincial Government is a stalwart defender of a publically funded, accessible health care system. Leaked documents strongly suggest that the current government direction is to create a two tiered system. A system that would legalize private insurance, doctors could work in a expanded private sector and the public sector and to move to deregulate currently funded services. Seniors need reassurance that this is not on the governments agenda.

Our scepticism is based on a number concerns that have been raised in the public news. Dr. Raj Sherman stated ``the 27-page internal Alberta Health and Wellness presentation strongly suggests that the provincial government has a two-part plan to delist health services, legalize new kinds of private insurance and allow doctors to provide public and private health care at the same time``. This statement is very concerning. Dr. Sherman further states that the government does have a secret plan and ``this is basically privatizing healthcare``. This is an alarming statement coming from a former Health and Wellness parliamentary assistant.

I note that on page 21, of Alberta Health legislation moving forward, dated July 12, 2010, phase II-Legislation that it states ``consider private insurance options for limited health services``. This can only mean creeping privatization. This is completely unacceptable. The issue, contained in the document, is that Albertans currently cannot buy private insurance for services provided in Alberta. That is planned to be changed, thru regulations. What is the scope of these proposed Regulations? This needs public discussion and debate. We assume that the proposed regulations will clarify the Governments intentions but will they be developed in secrecy or thru an open process.

The situation that seniors now find ourselves facing is that we are not clear on what our health care system is going to look like. This situation harkens back to a private and public system of the `third way` that was previously rejected by Albertans. This idea has been around for a long time and has never been accepted or embraced by Albertans. It is still not acceptable to seniors.

This Government needs to look to what Albertans want, not what you think we need. Our most pressing issue is to improve our current health care system. It is not broken. It has been mismanaged. One healthcare Board has been a failure. Poor decisions have been made to the detriment of our health care delivery system and Albertans are paying the price. Another new system is not the answer. Fix what we have is the answer.

Dr. Stephen Duckett outlined needs on plans for senior health at the Westin Hotel on March 22, 2010. Why are the needs he identified still not being addressed. It appears that one hand is not working well with the other.

Seniors are extremely concerned. We value our current public health delivery system and are opposed to creeping privatization. We stand ready to defend our public system and to oppose any two-tier system that appears to be in the planning stage. Evidence of such a plan being contemplated is overwhelming. Seniors are alarmed and suggest that privatization is the wrong way to go for the future.

It is the recommendation of SUN that an open consultation process be commenced immediately. We would suggest that a panel of seniors be empowered to work with Alberta Health and Wellness to develop all new health care legislation to ensure seniors can be proactive and not reactive. We need to get it right as the decisions of today will need to serve us for the next 25 years.