



Medical Tourism

Question to MPP: Will you urge the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to immediately ban medical tourism?

Hospitals and other health-care organizations are grappling with tight fiscal realities as stagnant budgets attempt to accommodate changing population health needs. A short-sighted approach being used by a number of Ontario's hospitals is establishing for-profit medical tourism businesses. RNAO is aware of programs operating within: Mount Sinai Hospital, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre and University Health Network. We are also aware of a joint proposal in place between Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit and Windsor Regional Hospital to establish a “medical free-trade zone” that enables medical tourism.

RNAO is in staunch opposition to medical tourism because it turns health care into a commodity to be bought and sold.¹ For nurses, medical tourism is the beginning of the end of Medicare,² as it opens the door to lawsuits driven by wealthy Ontarians denied private care and for-profit interest groups. They will argue that if out-of-country patients can pay their way to preferential treatment, so, too, should Ontarians. Medical tourism also encourages lawsuits from foreign investors under Canada's free trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, which protect against such lawsuits only “to the extent that they are social services established or maintained for a public purpose.” Medical tourism undermines the “public purpose” designation.

This is an issue concerning our already stretched health human resources being used for a parallel, for-profit system. We know this will erode timely access, the quality of the public system, and public support for Medicare. And we know this is not the deal taxpayers made with government. There has been no public consultation in the development of medical tourism programs.

References:

- ¹ Open letter: strengthen Ontario's health system by immediately banning medical tourism and rejecting for-profit plasma collection (2014, July 3). *Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario*. Retrieved from: http://rnao.ca/sites/rnao-ca/files/RNAO_Open_Letter_to_Premier_-_Reject_For-Profit_Health_Care.pdf
- ² Medical tourism: the beginning of the end of Medicare (May/June 2014). *Registered Nurse Journal*. Retrieved from: <http://rnao.ca/sites/rnao-ca/files/CEODispatchMayJune2014.pdf>