

To the Hon. Mr. Ross Wiseman and the Hon. Mr. Danny Williams:

As the only national organization in Canada dedicated to issues surrounding ovarian cancer, Ovarian Cancer Canada is extremely alarmed at the situation unfolding in Newfoundland and the imminent impact on patient care.

Ovarian cancer is a deadly gynecological cancer. With no screening or early detection test, most cases are diagnosed late and the prognosis is poor. Research has shown that surgery performed by a gynecologic oncologist offers the best possible outcome, and of course, the earlier the treatment begins is a critical factor. It is unthinkable that, should Drs. Dawson, Power and Popaduk leave, this essential care will not be offered to women in their own province.

It has been suggested that specialists will be recruited from outside the province. That there is already a shortage of gynecologic oncologists in Canada has not been addressed, and this is simply an unrealistic statement.

Facing the diagnosis is an enormous emotional struggle, the surgery and treatments are difficult, and it is unreasonable that the province of Newfoundland would consider airlifting women away from their family and community support systems to have treatment elsewhere. The issue of full and comprehensive funding for the treatment of gynecological cancer within the province must be addressed immediately. A solution must include fair and equitable remuneration for the doctors as well as the support system for care outlined in the report presented by gynecologic oncologists to Newfoundland and Labrador's Department of Health.

In an effort to address the serious human resource shortage in this medical specialty, Ovarian Cancer Canada launched a program in 2006, to offer travel awards to medical students choosing gyn-oncology as a one month elective. These awards are intended to encourage medical students seeking a specialty to choose gynecologic oncology as a practice area. To date, all students who have received an award have decided to move forward with this as a career specialty.

We urge the Minister of Health to move quickly to resolve this impasse. Already women in Newfoundland are panicking and burdened with added stress from a situation that has escalated too far. Women are mothers, sisters, daughters and wives, the very core of family life. The impact of this will be devastating to families across the province.

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