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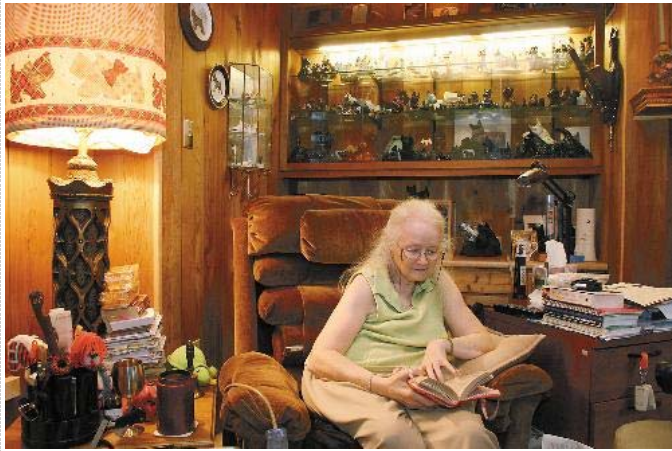
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Health professionals, patients pleased with agreement for gynecologic oncologists

BY DAVE BARTLETT AND NADYA BELL

The Telegram



Ovarian cancer survivor Emir Andrews says women being treated for reproductive cancers in this province now have one less thing to worry about. The province reached an agreement Monday to keep the three specialists who treat such cancers from resigning. — Photo by Rhonda Hayward/The Telegram

Women suffering from reproductive cancers won't be losing their doctors after the province announced a deal Monday to keep the province's three gynecologic oncologists from resigning.

The specialists, doctors Lesa Dawson, Cathy Popadiuk and Patti Power, tendered their resignations in July citing working conditions, lack of resources and salary as the main reasons they were leaving.

The doctors also said these problems hurt their ability to provide adequate patient care.

The doctors originally were set to go in October but later said they would stay until December because of delays in notifying patients.

A new agreement now adds those specialists, and others, to an agreement reached with pathologists and some other oncologists in May which gave them significant pay increases.

"It sounds like what they should've done in the first place," said Emir Andrews, an ovarian cancer survivor living in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's.

"Hopefully, that will be enough to keep them here which will be a big relief to all the women in this province," said Andrews.

"It's been really difficult the last number of weeks," said Popadiuk. "(But) it's really clear that this government is committed to a vision for Newfoundland to be a centre of excellence for women's health, and treatment of women's cancers.

"(The patients) will have more timely access to more up-to-date and innovative treatments, that are on the cutting edge," she continued.

Popadiuk also said including other specialists - pediatric and the hematological oncologists - in the deal, as well as an earlier start to talks with the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association (NLMA) for all doctors in the province, are both additional pieces of good news.

NLMA president, Dr. Liz Callahan is currently touring the province speaking with doctors.

The Telegram asked her if she was surprised by Monday's announcement.

"I was and I wasn't. I think I realized that somewhere along the way government had to step up to the plate because, you know, the health and safety of Newfoundlanders is of vital importance," said Callahan by phone from Corner Brook.

She was pleased both with the announcement and the news that government wants to begin negotiations on the next collective agreement early.

"Being able to start in January is definitely a bonus," said Callahan.

But she said it wouldn't surprise her if other groups of doctors bring up problems within their fields and continue to threaten to resign.

"We're certainly seeing lots of dissension among the ranks in terms of doctors feeling that government doesn't value their services," she said.

She says internal medicine specialists, urologists and rural doctors all have issues that the province has to address.

The premier also said on Monday that he hoped to move beyond past scuffles with the NLMA - and its executive director, Rob Ritter - and that, come Jan. 1, both sides will start fresh.

Callahan said her group can do that if the premier can.

Interim president and CEO of Eastern Health, Louise Jones, also weighed in on the announcement.

"This is very good news. We were happy to hear it, and that agreement has been reached with the gynecologic oncologists, and we look forward to working with our physicians in the interest of patient care in the future," said Jones in an e-mail to The Telegram.

The Society of Gynecologic Oncologists of Canada (GOC) was also pleased to hear the news.

"We thought that the women out there would greatly suffer from the loss of their three very good physicians otherwise. It was a huge concern," said Dr. Marie Plante, GOC president.

Plante also pointed out while the last few months have been stressful for all involved, it has highlighted the national shortage of the specialists.

That's something Popadiuk agrees with.

"I think the whole country now understands what gynecologic oncologists do, because we are such a small select group we don't have a very big voice. So I think that's been positive for everyone," said Popadiuk.

23/09/08



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