

# Patients could die without speedy solution to oncology impasse, Williams told

*Last Updated: Wednesday, September 17, 2008 | 8:58 AM ET*

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*Bette Winsor: 'Isn't it bad enough to be told you have cancer?' (CBC)*

Newfoundland and Labrador's three gynecologic oncologists have stopped accepting referrals, leaving one patient pleading with government to take action quickly to save lives.

The three specialists — Lesa Dawson, Cathy Popadiuk and Patti Power, all based in St. John's — previously set Sept. 16 as the day they would stop accepting new patients. The doctors had said they would resign in October, but have now pushed that deadline back to December.

The physicians have asked for increases in support staff and access to more operating-room time, as well as better remuneration. They say it is unfair their patients receive a lower quality of care than patients elsewhere in Canada.

Cancer survivor Bette Winsor said she is furious that the impasse between the physicians and the Newfoundland and Labrador government has dragged on this long.

"If [Premier] Danny Williams doesn't soon do something about this, it's going to mean a death sentence for so many women," Winsor said.

"Isn't it bad enough to be told you have cancer? But then to be told there's nothing they can do or they don't know what to do with you, ... it's like a double whammy," she said. "You think, 'Well, I'm going to die. If I don't get help, what am I going to do?' "

Health Minister Ross Wiseman is not commenting publicly on the matter, and the Department of Health and Community Services said it could not comment on what will happen with patients now needing referrals for suspected gynecologic cancers, although it said progress is being made on the issue.



*Dr. Elizabeth Callahan: 'I find it very difficult to imagine that government would let it get to this stage.'* (CBC)

Elizabeth Callahan, president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association and a general practitioner in St. John's, said she has no idea what to tell patients who may need a referral.

She added that physicians have been given no guidance on how to advise their patients.

"I find it a very, very difficult prospect.... It's difficult enough to tell a patient they have cancer, but to have to tell a patient that they have cancer and that I cannot provide the service that they need from this point on — I find that very difficult to imagine how we're going to deal with that," Callahan told CBC News.

"I find it very difficult to imagine that government would let it get to this stage."

CBC News has been told that meetings are being scheduled between government officials and the three physicians.

Speaking at a fundraiser for ovarian cancer awareness last week, Popadiuk told CBC News that there has been progress with officials at Eastern Health, the authority that employs all of them. However, she said, there had been little progress with top government officials.

Wiseman sparked a controversy this summer when he said the government would, if necessary, send gynecologic oncology patients out of province for treatment.

Wiseman also said he was confident government would be able to recruit replacements for the three specialists should they follow through on their resignations, even though there are only about 50 such specialists in the country.

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**loriclarke** wrote: Posted 2008/09/17  
at 12:01 AM ET "disempowering?"

If the gyne-oncology crisis we are having were a men's health issue it would not be spoken of simply as "disempowering" for patients and their families to not have access to a sub-specialty.

Women cannot take more concessions. Women are dying horrendous, painful and humiliating deaths (which are sometimes preventable) with the knowledge that provincial authorities are doing too little for women too late. This is a sub-specialty where experienced and competent professionals have found their working conditions intolerable and dangerous to the patients for whom they are responsible. They have done all they can.

Once again, women are being treated as second-class citizens even as they continue to do the lion's share of the work of caring for others. Will Minister Wiseman please stand up for women and admit to the crisis in the current system or stand down.

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**eugenehallett** wrote:Posted 2008/09/17

at 11:50 AM ETHow i miss the days when you were sick they took care of you.montreal general at one time was the best in the world.now you are lucky to find a doctor and if you do make sure they know a little bit.one clinic doctor made my wife very ill.

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**Raynaldo** wrote:Posted 2008/09/17

at 11:44 AM ETAm I reading this right... where these 3 doctors imply that citizens will get better service once they get more money?

I read a lot of gripe but we should remember that is't not only the goverment that is to blame. Health care budgets have been increasing like crazy all over but the patients aren't getting any better service because doctors, unionized staff and suppliers have all been raiding the trough.

Just think of why a hospital bed should cost around \$10,000.00... you could get a new car for that. This is a prime example of how a union (of 3 no more) is blackmailing the government.

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**Rob in TO** wrote:Posted 2008/09/17

at 10:58 AM ETI think that Newfoundland is the canary in the coal mine for the rest of Canada.

Although this situation in NFLD is obviously WAY past the typical health care crises we're all so used to dealing with (Do you have a family doctor? I sure don't), issues like this seem to be popping up all over Canada with ever-increasing frequency. What are we going to do when we don't have enough specialists in ANY province? Send sick Canadians to the States to benefit from health care profiteers ?

I think that health care needs to become a non-partisan issue. Williams, Harper, Dion and the rest of these jokers are using people's very lives to leverage political capital. No party and no governemtn (provincial or the feds) has the moral high ground on this issue.

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**Ottawamom** wrote:Posted 2008/09/17

at 10:39 AM ETThis issue is beyond politics and cuts to the heart of all of us.. Its one thing to die after a good battle and quite another not to be able to fight because the care was not available. I hope the NL govt will act to ensure these people have every chance possible to live.

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