

## LOCAL NEWS

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**Women's cancer surgeons resign****Doctors say patient safety, workplace respect major issues**BY NADYA BELL  
The Telegram

The province could lose all of its surgeons that deal specifically with women's cancers in October, if long-standing workplace issues are not resolved.

All three gynecologic oncologists have submitted their resignations that would become effective on Oct. 7, 2008, Eastern Health confirmed on Tuesday.

Dr. Patti Power, Dr. Cathy Popadiuk and Dr. Lesa Dawson treat women with cancers specific to the reproductive organs from beginning to end of the disease, including giving chemotherapy, radiation therapy and performing surgery.

According to a report prepared by the doctors and submitted to the Department of Health, Newfoundland's gynecologic oncology sector is at a crisis point because of physical limitations and the lowest salaries for their specialty in the country.

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The specialists and officials from Eastern Health and the provincial government had been negotiating to resolve the problems, but the issue was brought to public attention by media reports Tuesday.

One of the doctors, who did not want to be identified, says they were hoping to resolve the issues quietly to avoid creating unnecessary concern for the public and their patients.

"We didn't want to cause any pain or grief for the patients, so we're preparing to notify them in a timely fashion that we might be leaving," she says.

The planned resignation came about as the specialists watched their colleagues in medical and radiation oncology get a substantial raise from the provincial government in May.

Gynecologic oncologists in Newfoundland receive less money than medical and radiation oncologists in the province, who do not perform surgery.

A Newfoundland gynecologic oncologist makes just under \$250,000, while specialists in all other provinces make at least \$350,000, and salaries in Ontario and B.C. are over \$450,000.

As well as wanting to be paid a competitive salary compared to the rest of the country, the doctors say they need more resources, from support staff and office space to specialized equipment.

A major issue for the department has been clinical inconsistencies in pathology, meaning that they spend more time troubleshooting results of lab tests. Many of their tests have to be sent to labs in Toronto, meaning patients have to wait a long time for their treatment to start.

"We've been devalued and our patients have been devalued," says one of the doctors.

"You can get a surgeon or a gynecologist to try to do the operation on the patient, and you can get a medical oncologist to give the chemotherapy to the patient, but mortality increases.

"Survival increases if a gynecological oncologist does the treatment, because we do the whole spectrum of care."

In a statement, Eastern Health says it is working with the specialists to address their issues, and hope they will withdraw their resignations. However, Eastern Health is also actively recruiting other physicians to fill their positions if they do leave.

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