



Health organizations call for ban on medical tourism

TORONTO, Oct. 29, 2014 – Hospitals that offer preferential medical treatment for a fee to international patients compromise Ontario’s health system. That’s the warning a coalition of health organizations made today during a media conference held at Queen’s Park.

Representatives from the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO), Canadian Doctors for Medicare, the Association of Ontario Midwives, and the Association of Ontario Health Centres say the government is fully aware that several hospitals are engaging in medical tourism and is allowing it to continue unabated.

Medical tourism refers to a practice where health-care institutions create for-profit programs to attract patients from other countries to receive health care on a pay-for-treatment basis.

Some Toronto hospitals have provided care on a for-profit basis to people from outside Canada. Last month, RNAO filed a Freedom of Information request to determine where else medical tourism is occurring, and how much the Ontario government is behind this attack on Medicare.

“We have raised this issue with Premier Kathleen Wynne and with Deb Matthews (former health minister) and Eric Hoskins (current health minister) numerous times, and although they are aware of our concerns, they are not doing enough to stop this practice in its tracks,” said Doris Grinspun, RNAO’s Chief Executive Officer, adding that if hospitals can treat patients from other countries in exchange for money, Ontarians could also demand the same priority service for a fee.

The coalition says allowing patients to pay for preferential health services runs counter to the spirit of Medicare. “The Association of Ontario Health Centres is firmly committed to a not-for-profit, publicly funded health system. We’re opposed to medical tourism because it represents a shift to for-profit, private care. Health care is a public good - not a business venture,” said Adrianna Tetley, CEO of the Association of Ontario Health Centres.

The coalition says that hospitals should not be allowed to develop for-profit, two-tier programs for the purpose of generating revenue. “Midwives are committed to the ideals of the *Canada Health Act*, including universality and accessibility. A two-tiered, for-profit hospital system risks jeopardizing the comprehensive, accessible, universal health-care services that people living in Ontario and Canada value so deeply and that midwives are so proud to be a part of,” said Kelly Stadelbauer, Executive Director of the Association of Ontario Midwives.

Members of the coalition pointed out that they support humanitarian care. “We have great health care in Canada and we should be keen to share our expertise and provide humanitarian service to patients in need. But no one should be able to jump to the front of the queue ahead of people with real medical needs, no matter where they come from and no matter how much money they have,” said Dr. Ryan Meili, Vice-Chair of Canadian Doctors for Medicare.

The coalition applauded the courage of Pierre LaPlante, a registered nurse from Toronto's University Health Network who spoke out against the practice at his hospital. Grinspun called on all health-care professionals to follow Mr. LaPlante's lead. “If you know of other instances happening in your workplaces, we urge you to come forward,” said Grinspun, “We have reason to believe that medical tourism is going on at other hospitals, and if we don't stop this practice, it will lead to the end of Medicare.”

The coalition urged the Premier and Health Minister to immediately close the door on medical tourism and impose a ban, saying this is the only way to protect the province's publicly funded health system and ensure hospitals are focused on meeting the care needs of Ontarians.

Read more about this issue on [RNAO's](#) website. Be part of the coalition's call for a ban on medical tourism and join the conversation [#banmedicaltourism](#).

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) is the professional association representing registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and nursing students in Ontario. Since 1925, RNAO has advocated for healthy public policy, promoted excellence in nursing practice, increased nurses' contribution to shaping the health-care system, and influenced decisions that affect nurses and the public they serve. For more information about RNAO, visit our website at [RNAO.ca](#) or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Canadian Doctors for Medicare is a physician-led organization committed to evidence-based advocacy and innovation that will protect and improve Canada's single-payer universal health care system. For more information about CDM, visit [www.canadiandoctorsformedicare.ca](#)

The Association of Ontario Midwives is the professional organization representing midwives and the profession of midwifery in Ontario. For more information about Ontario Midwives, visit [www.OntarioMidwives.ca](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

The Association of Ontario Health Centres (AOHC) is Ontario's voice for community-governed primary health care. The association represents 111 community-governed primary health-care organizations. Membership includes Ontario's Community Health Centres, Aboriginal Health Access Centres, Community Family Health Teams and Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics. For more information, visit us at [www.aohc.org](#) and follow up on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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