

Leaked documents expose government plans for more contracting out to private clinics

Government documents obtained by the BC Health Coalition expose plans to expand the contracting out of surgeries to for-profit clinics even though the “Conversation on Health” public consultation has not yet concluded.

In a July letter sent to all B.C.’s private clinics, Deputy Minister Gordon Macatee asks clinic owners for information about their facilities’ operations in order to help government explore “further opportunities for innovative private sector involvement” in public health care.

The coalition’s medicare campaigner Leslie Dickout says it is more proof that government is not listening to citizens and is intent on expanding private health care despite the evidence that for-profit clinics cost more, undermine public accountability and drain valuable public health care resources.

“There is no shortage of proven public solutions to strengthen health care for all. It’s time this government listened to British Columbians’ input into the Health Conversation and invest public dollars in real health care improvements,” says Dickout.

The documents also reveal, for the first time, the extent of for-profit clinics’ incursion into public health care. Health authorities have signed 65 contracts or renewals with 22 different private clinics since 2003.

But despite the large number of contracts, the survey accompanying Macatee’s letter shows that government knows very little about the operations of private clinics including basic information about sterilization procedures, medical staff accreditation and staffing levels.

The survey also requests information on the clinics’ revenue sources, hours of operation, the number of overnight stays by patients, patient safety procedures, diagnostic testing capacity, and even whether a blood bank is present on site.

“British Columbians should be concerned that this government has been handing out public dollars to private clinics despite their apparent lack of very basic information about these facilities’ operations,” says Dickout.

“It makes more sense to expand the kind of innovative and cost-effective pilot projects that have already reduced wait times and increased access here in BC and across Canada – all within regulated public facilities.”

These successes include the North Shore Joint Replacement clinic, which centralizes and coordinates care between physicians, as well as Richmond Hospital’s streamlined surgical procedures, which have shortened waitlists by 75 per cent. In addition, the UBC Centre for Surgical Innovation’s province-wide program has provided a 20 percent increase in the number of hip and knee surgeries performed in B.C.

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, knee replacement surgeries performed in Canadian public hospitals average \$8,000. In private clinics they cost between \$14,000 and \$18,000.