

Ontario Health Coalition

MEDIA
RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **Attention: Assignment Editors**

End Botched Cancer Care Privatization Now: Ontario Health Coalition

Toronto - The Ontario Health Coalition renewed demands for an end to private cancer treatment after today's release of a Special Audit. Last winter in a surprise announcement, Cancer Care Ontario - a government-appointed body that oversees the province's cancer treatment - revealed that a renewable one-year contract had been given to their former Executive Vice President's new private for-profit company to run an after-hours cancer treatment centre at Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto. This marked the establishment of the first profit-seeking clinic of this sort in Ontario since the inception of public Medicare. Earlier today, the Provincial Auditor released a Special Audit chastising the government and Cancer Care Ontario for their actions in this matter.

"Today's Auditor's report adds to the world-wide evidence that privatized health care is not a cheaper or better — in fact, it is usually more expensive and removes vital services from non-profit delivery and public control," stated Irene Harris, coalition co chair. "The government's botched record on cancer treatment is further proof that the Conservatives are pursuing private health care even when it makes no sense. Today, we reiterate our demand that the government take immediate steps to ensure that cancer treatment be placed back into public non-profit control when this contract comes up for renewal in March."

Among the key findings in the Special Audit released today by the Provincial Auditor:

I. The auditor could not find evidence that Cancer Care Ontario (CCO) had considered public not-for-profit delivery options nor had it compared costs in the for-profit and public realms before privatizing the after-hours cancer treatment clinic at Sunnybrook Hospital.

- the Ministry is funding the privatized cancer treatment centre at a higher level than it is funding public cancer treatment centres - \$500 more per treatment - in addition to \$4 million in start-up funding.

- there is little evidence that CCO attempted to compare costs for public and private options
- there was little attempt to find a public option for treatment
- there is no evidence that CCO considered a non-profit approach

II. Cancer Care Ontario acted in violation of the government's policy of requiring a fair, open and transparent competitive process in awarding the contract to Canadian Radiation Oncology Services Ltd., headed by Dr. Tom McGowan who was Executive Vice President of Cancer Care Ontario until after his company received the contract for the privatized cancer treatment centre.

- there was only a limited attempt to seek other bidders
- the contract was kept secret to avoid public displeasure
- there is no justification for giving Dr. McGowan's company right of first-refusal in any additional privatized clinics
- Dr. McGowan remained a Vice President at CCO until after his new company won the contract

III. Waiting lists for cancer treatment have not changed. 70% of patients in Ontario are still not receiving cancer treatment within the recommended 4 week time period.

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