

Ontario Health Coalition

MEDIA
RELEASE

September 4, 2002

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **Attention: Assignment Editors**

Minister Clement's Semantics in Banff Will Disguise Fatal Poison Pill: Health Coalition Warns

Toronto - The Ontario Health Coalition warns today that Health Minister Tony Clement's lip service to the Canada Health Act is cover for a dangerous agenda. Responding to the Minister's press statement yesterday, coalition spokespeople point to the Minister and his government's record on health care and urge Ontarians to beware.

"For-profit health care delivery is the fatal poison pill hidden in Mr. Clement's public relations smooth talk. While he says he wants to further the agenda of access to diagnostic tests what he really means is that he wants the federal government to allow Ontario to set up two-tier access to MRIs and CT scans so that private companies can make more money," notes Irene Harris, coalition co chair. "Federal support for Medicare needs to be based on standards and values that ensure that more money isn't simply flowed to for-profit companies."

"Ontarians need to beware. Profit seeking companies drive up health costs and push for new user fees and two tier access to boost profit margins," adds Ethel Meade, coalition delegate from the Ontario Coalition of Senior Citizens' Organizations. "This government's addiction to for-profit medicine threatens the future universality and public funding of our health system."

Since it got into government the Ontario PC party has radically altered the balance of public not for profit and private for-profit control of Ontario's health system:

- approx. 90% of Ontario's laboratory sector is now controlled by a private sector oligopoly of three companies: MDS, Gamma Dynacare (recently bought by Lab Corp), and Canadian Medical Laboratories.

- The non profit Victorian Order of Nurses, VHA and Red Cross have closed programs and offices across the province as homecare has been handed over to for-profit corporations such as Bayshore Health Inc., Paramed, Bradson, ComCare, WeCare and others.
- The majority of Ontario's long term care beds are now controlled by for-profit companies as a result of the PC government's bed awards over the last several years. Several corporations are the big winners: the multinational giants Extendicare Inc. and Central Park Lodges, and domestics Leisureworld and Regency Care.
- Cancer treatment is now offered for profit at Toronto's Sunnybrook Hospital, through Canadian Radiation Oncology Services Ltd.
- Health Minister Tony Clement announced two for-profit hospitals to be built in Ottawa and Brampton with awards to private consortia to be announced in the new year.

The Ontario Health Coalition has repeatedly demanded evidence that these privatizations are, in Minister Clement's words, "faster, better, cheaper." So far, no luck. Homecare services dissolved in severe staffing shortages when workers voted with their feet to leave the working conditions in the newly profitised sector. The government has faced ceaseless complaint as more and more evidence is unearthed that residents' care levels in Ontario's long term care facilities are the poorest in Canada. The Provincial Auditor has found that profitised cancer treatment costs more and hasn't dented waiting lists. Private labs have taken the most profitable section of the service and left the most expensive to the public. For profit hospitals around the globe have cost much more than hospitals in the public system. In Britain, the British Medical Journal reports that for-profit hospitals have resulted in bed cuts, on average, of 30%.

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