

HEALTH CARE WORKER LAYOFFS AT SENIORS CARE FACILITY IN NANAIMO – Monday April 4, 2016

J. Darcy: For the second time in two years, frail seniors at a care facility in Nanaimo, many of whom suffer from dementia, are facing a major disruption in their care. This time all 155 staff at Wexford Creek care home are in two years, frail seniors at a care facility in Nanaimo, many of whom suffer from dementia, are facing a major disruption in their care. This time, all 155 staff at Wexford Creek care home are being fired. The care facility is being sold because this government isn't providing enough funding for it. Can the Minister of Health explain to these frail seniors and their families why the government is subjecting them to this latest round of disruption in their lives?

Hon. T. Lake: Quality of care and safety for residents is an absolute priority for the ministry and for health authorities. Whenever a service agreement is transferred to a new operator, the health authority works very closely with the operator and with the families of residents to ensure a smooth transition. I am always concern when residents of care facilities are impacted by these changes. This was a result of an organization that put in an RFP, that won an RFP, a fair and open contest, and now has decided that they can no longer operate under the conditions under which they bid. We will work closely with Island Health. We will work closely with the operator to ensure that the impact on residents and their families is mitigated as much as possible.

Madame Speaker: The member for New Westminster on a supplemental.

J. Darcy: Every time we raise one of these stories in this House, the minister says the same thing. He's concerned, he shows some empathy, but nothing changes. It keeps happening over and over and over again, and it's not acceptable. It was exactly two years ago in this same facility that layoff notices were issued to all of the staff — the care aides, the nurses, the housekeeping staff, the food services staff. And while they were rehired, most of them at lower wages and very few benefits, it was not before incredible anxiety was created for the 150 frail seniors in that facility.

We know that continuity of care is vital for seniors and that they form intensely close bonds with the staff who care for their most intimate care needs every single day. It is this government's actions which have resulted in these repeated rounds of layoffs which are harming frail and vulnerable seniors. It is part of the shameful legacy of the B.C. Liberal government's Bill 29, and it's time it stopped. Can the minister explain why his government is so heartless that it is letting this happen once again and disrupting the lives of these frail elderly in care?

Hon. T. Lake: This government was the first in Canada to appoint an independent seniors advocate. A seniors advocate....Interjections.

Hon. T. Lake: The members opposite may mock. The seniors advocate has done amazing work looking at the needs of seniors around the province of British Columbia. Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Members. Members.

Hon. T. Lake: The reality is that we have added almost 7,400 publicly subsidized residential care, assisted-living and group home beds since 2001 to almost 32,000 beds, a much better record than members opposite had when they had the opportunity. We will work with Island Health. We will work with the operator to ensure that there is no impact on the residents and their families in this particular situation.

D. Routley: Since it took numerous private members' bills from the NDP opposition to get the government to appoint a seniors advocate, it will probably take numerous situations like this to get the government to do anything.

The operators of Wexford Creek raised the alarm over what they call chronic underfunding two years ago. They said then, two years ago, that the funding model from the government wasn't working. This government refused to listen, and it's frail seniors, my constituents, who are paying the price. How can the minister justify forcing Nanaimo seniors to face losing their care providers for the second time in two years?

D. Routley: The operator knew constituents, who are paying the price. How can the minister justify forcing Nanaimo seniors to face losing their care providers for the second time in two years?

Hon. T. Lake: The operator knew what the costs were and what the payments were when they bid in an open and fair and transparent process. It's a situation that we face now. We will ensure that there is a smooth transition to any new operator, that the residents are looked after and that their families are looked after. And we will ensure that they continue to get the high-quality care that they deserve in this care home.

Madame Speaker: Member for Nanaimo—North Cowichan on a supplemental.

D. Routley: "Work with the operators." "Smooth transition." This is not a smooth transition. In 2012, Ombudsperson Kim Carter said that continuity of care was a crucial issue for seniors. She said that the ministry had not taken sufficient care to make sure that seniors were protected from the impacts of large-scale layoffs. That was four years ago.

In the last two years, seniors at Wexford Creek have faced the turmoil of losing their care aides and nurses and others not once, but twice. It is this government's shameful legacy, a legacy of Bill 29, a legacy of putting ideology ahead of the interests of vulnerable seniors.

Will the minister finally step in? Will he make sure that these seniors aren't going to face more disruption at Wexford Creek?

Hon. T. Lake: Hon. Speaker, 42 percent of the expenditures of the provincial government goes to health care in the province of British Columbia — 42 percent. The members opposite talk about spending more here, spending more there, this opportunity, that opportunity. It only takes more money, more money, more money. And yet the members opposite do everything they can to prevent...Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Members.

Hon. T. Lake: ...our ability to grow the economy, to ensure that we have the ability to increase spending on health care across the province of British Columbia.

STAFFING LEVELS IN SENIORS CARE FACILITIES – Tuesday April 5, 2016

J. Darcy: Yesterday I asked the Minister of Health about his plans to force seniors in Nanaimo to endure the second major disruption in their care in the last two years, and the minister replied that the quality of care for residents was his number one concern. Well, last month the seniors advocate released a detailed report that indicated that nearly 80 percent — 80 percent — of government-funded senior and the minister replied that the quality of care for residents was his number one concern. Well, last month the seniors advocate released a detailed report that indicated that nearly 80 percent — 80 percent — of government-funded seniors facilities in this province do not even meet the government's own staffing guidelines. In fact, the seniors advocate... The minister said yesterday that she does amazing work, and I agree with that — absolutely. The seniors advocate was surprised to discover how badly this government is shortchanging seniors. Can the Minister of Health tell us why 80 percent of the care homes that this government funds do not meet the staffing guidelines established by this government?

Hon. T. Lake: The seniors advocate — the first seniors advocate in Canada — does some great work, and we appreciate the information that she provides to government, the recommendations that she provides to government. That's why this House has a bill before it to increase the flexibility around assisted living. That was a recommendation of the seniors advocate, one that we are acting upon. So we will continue to have discussions.

But it's important to note that hours of care are a guideline for planning purposes. Seniors are not widgets. They need individual plans of care. We make sure that health authorities look at each individual resident as a person, and we want to assure them and their families that each of those residents as an individual has an individual care plan.

And it's important that we shift resources into home and community. This is what we are doing. We have recognized that in our plan. The members opposite should support us when we do that instead of standing up every time we do that and criticizing those actions.

Madame Speaker: To remind members, the Chair will hear the answer and the question.

J. Darcy: The minister is right that our seniors are not widgets, and the impact of not having proper staffing levels in residential care is human and is profound. We're talking about whether there are enough staff to ensure that our seniors are toileted in time. We're talking about whether there are enough staff to ensure that our seniors get even one bath a week, much less two. These are the seniors who built our province — our loved ones, our parents and our grandparents — and they deserve better from this government.

According to the study that the seniors advocate reported, fully one-third of seniors in care are being given anti-psychotic medication when they don't even have a diagnosis of a psychosis. What do the facility operators say? Well, they take their cues from the government. They say: "We can only do what we're funded to do." In other words, if the government wanted facilities that were properly staffed, they would properly fund them.

My question to the minister is this. If quality of care for our seniors is really a priority, why are you shortchanging 80 percent of our most vulnerable seniors?

Hon. T. Lake: As usual, the answer to every problem from the NDP is: more money. We've heard that time and time again. So, if they would like to listen....

Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Members will come to order. The members will come to order.

Please continue.

Hon. T. Lake: We know that we have seniors awaiting placement in residential care in what we call alternative level of care beds throughout the province of British Columbia, so we know that we need to shift resources into home and community because we know we can provide higher quality care at a lower cost in community. Every time that we do that, the members opposite get up and say: "You can't do that. You can't do that." Heaven help anyone who shifts funding into home and community to allow seniors to be looked after properly.