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Out-patient rates show Regina surgical clinic more costly

Regina: Contrary to the Health Minister's claim, contracting-out surgeries to a private for-profit clinic in Regina is not cost-effective and could harm the capacity of the public system to deliver timely medical procedures.

Health Minister McMorris announced this week the government is paying Omni Surgery Centre about \$1,500 for each knee surgery performed at the clinic, stating it was cheaper than the in-hospital cost which the government estimates is \$1,700.

But CUPE accuses the government of "botxing" the public sector costs to make Omni Surgery Centre – which specializes in cosmetic surgery – look better.

According to the interprovincial billing rates, Saskatchewan pays less than \$1,000 for out-patients when they have the same surgical procedure done in a public facility in another province. The rates, available on the Ontario Health Ministry's website, show the public cost is \$997 for day care surgery.

"The out-patient rate agreement suggests for every two knee surgeries performed by Regina's privately-owned clinic, three could be performed in a public facility for the same cost," says CUPE's national researcher Cheryl Stadnichuk. "Investing scarce health care resources in a private for-profit clinic is not a good investment unless you are one of the company's shareholders – a list that includes a number of orthopedic surgeons from the health region," she states.

That's one of the reasons CUPE is taking the matter to arbitration. CUPE's collective agreement protects public health services in the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region and restricts the employers' ability to contract-out. The arbitration will be heard in Regina later this month.

CUPE staff representative Suzanne Posyniak says scarce health care dollars would be better spent on expanding the capacity of the public system to provide more day surgeries and diagnostic tests.

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“The truth is hospital operating rooms, CT scans and diagnostic equipment are not working to full capacity in Regina and could be much better utilized.”

For example, the three CT scans in Regina only take appointments during the day. Two CT scans operate in the evening, but only on an emergency basis, she says. In addition, the CT area at the Regina General Hospital is often short-staffed. “Fewer people working mean fewer CT scans are done.”

Posyniak says the situation will likely get worse as the for-profit clinics poach scarce professionals from the public system.

CUPE represents 5,500 health care providers in the Regina Qu’Appelle Health Region.

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