

Wiseman called 'out of touch' on dialysis needs

Last Updated: Wednesday, March 25, 2009 | 11:25 AM NT

[CBC News](#)



Health Minister Ross Wiseman said he would follow up with health officials on the need for dialysis treatment in western Labrador. (CBC)

Newfoundland and Labrador's health minister is defending himself from accusations that he is disconnected from the health needs of dialysis patients and doesn't know what is happening in his own department.

Ross Wiseman came under fire in the legislature Tuesday over shortages of dialysis treatment, particularly over the case of a Labrador City man who has moved to St. John's for medical care.

"How do you expect to provide and allow for confidence to be building in the health-care system, if you are going to be so out of touch with issues like this one in Labrador West?" Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones asked.

The issue of dialysis care came to light through media coverage of the case of Maurice Connors, 71, who is spending his days in a small room at a medical hostel in St. John's, because treatment is not available in the Labrador City area.

In an interview last week with CBC News, Connors said he felt isolated "being here, being away from everything, everything I know — I've been in Labrador for 47 years."

At the legislature, Wiseman was hammered over his comments that he had "not had any representation directly from either the community or from the health authority to establish a unit in Labrador City."

"I was appalled to learn that the minister was not aware that there was a need for dialysis equipment in Labrador West, when they have for two years been raising money in that community," Jones said.

Wiseman told the legislature that he had not said he was not personally aware of the issue, but that health managers have never raised it as an urgent concern.

"At an operational level, as a minister, we would not necessarily have any idea what is happening on a

day-to-day basis ... at many of our authorities, so it is a natural, normal process for us to rely on health authorities to identify health needs in respective areas of the province," Wiseman said.

The government maintains there is not enough of a critical mass in Labrador City and Wabush to warrant a dialysis unit.

NDP Leader Lorraine Michael disagrees.

"Just this morning, my office has been speaking with three families from Labrador West who have somebody getting dialysis and with different organizations from the area who list the need for dialysis at 10 people," Michael said.

Wiseman said Michael's numbers do not match what he has received from Labrador-Grenfell Health, but he promised to compare Michael's list of names with information from the health board.

He also said he would follow up with the health board to get a clearer sense of the need for dialysis.

In 2007, a community campaign led government to establish a dialysis unit in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.