

NEWS

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Patient falls through the cracks of health care system **LATEST NEWS**

Northern Pen

More and more stories are being made public about patients who are having surgeries and treatments cancelled and delayed and the emotional, physical and financial stress this is causing. The most recent incident involves a woman from Labrador who is experiencing delays in receiving radiation treatment for breast cancer, says Opposition Leader Yvonne Jones.

Zillah Kippenhuck has made five trips out of Labrador for her diagnosed breast cancer. Yesterday, she received her markings for treatment; however, it will be a minimum of four weeks before she starts receiving radiation therapy. Once the treatment begins, it will take another four weeks to complete her therapy. She was not advised of these extended timeframes prior to yesterday and she is struggling to afford the cost of continuous travel to and from Labrador, plus the cost of accommodations in St. John's waiting for her treatment.

"There are many patients in a similar circumstance to Ms. Kippenhuck," said Ms. Jones. "It is truly unfortunate that patients are being forced to deal with a system that does not provide the necessary supports, both emotionally and financially, that would offer her some stability. It is hard enough fighting cancer, it is more difficult when the system expects you to undergo this battle alone."

Jones says government must immediately move to correct two problems that have been identified. Patient navigators were recommended by Justice Cameron to assist patients in dealing with issues and concerns, providing emotional support, help to co-ordinate appointments, help with funding for drugs and supplies, information on what to expect, help in understanding the diagnosis and access to support groups, and help with accommodations and transportation during treatment. While government has committed funds to hire patient navigators, these positions have yet to be filled. Improvements are also required to the Medical Transportation Assistance Program that does not adequately reduce the financial burden of a cancer diagnosis for those who have to travel for cancer care services.

"Patients are being forced to wait weeks to receive treatment for diseases such as cancer, but are now experiencing the added stress of not knowing the system and being forced to incur significant debt while waiting for these treatments. I encourage government to look at the circumstances facing people like Ms. Kippenhuck and act to address these gaps being experienced by patients. Improvements to the Medical Transportation Assistance Program and the immediate hiring of patient navigators would go a long way to alleviating the stress being faced by many in our health care system."



YVONNE JONES