

PET equipment promise called out: Liberals

BY GREG KNOTT

THE TELEGRAM

The provincial Liberal party is calling on the government to fulfill a promise it made in last fall's election.

The Progressive Conservatives promised to buy a positron emission tomography (PET) scanner — a diagnostic imaging tool used in detecting the presence and severity of cancer, neurological disorders and cardiovascular disease. The Liberal's made the same promise.

Opposition leader Yvonne Jones said the equipment will give physicians the ability to treat diseases earlier and more accurately.

Health Minister Ross Wiseman said the government did make the commitment and it plans on delivering.

Jones said if government is really committed to buying the PET scanner, it needs to be done as part of the budget that's going to come down in March.

Wiseman said the government is currently in the middle of developing a budget for this coming year and putting together some longer term plans for capital acquisitions of equipment for health facilities around the province.

"As a part of this exercise we're going through now with the budget and with the equipment replacement strategy, that the PET scan is a part of that discussion," the minister explained.

Jones said a PET scanner requires several

components. One of which, is a cyclotron, which produces the radioactive material needed for the scan. She said the material only has a life span of a few hours.

Wiseman said in some jurisdictions some hospitals that are clustered close together share that service. He said the closest site to this province is Halifax.

The cyclotron does not have to be located in the province, but if it isn't, it would reduce the effectiveness of the scan, Jones said. The other option would be to fly the material in from out of province.

"If government is willing to purchase the PET scanner, I encourage them to also purchase the cyclotron so that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are not reliant on other provinces to provide this vital radioactive material," said Jones.

Wiseman wouldn't go so far as to say the PET scan could never function if the cyclotron wasn't located in the province, but with the geography of the province and the distance from the closest site, it would be challenging.

"Clearly, we want to make sure that when we purchase the unit that we're able to make it functional and that if in fact transportation is a challenge, then obviously it would become part of the acquisition process," said Wiseman.

"When we buy the PET scan, whatever the current technology is at that moment that's what we'll buy."

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Health Minister Ross Wiseman