



Health Minister Ross Wiseman and NDP Leader Lorraine Michael clashed Wednesday over comments made by Wiseman concerning faulty hormone receptor testing. — Photo by Joe Gibbons/The Telegram

HEALTH/POLITICS

Legal worries prompt decision on causes of death, leaders charge

By ROB ANTLE
THE TELEGRAM

Legal worries are behind the provincial government's reticence to probe further into the causes of death for 108 deceased patients whose hormone-receptor test results changed, the leaders of the province's opposition parties charge.

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones said she was "astounded" at the number of deceased patients with inaccurate test results.

"Certainly, there is a potential that a number of these women died directly because they did not get the right treatment," Jones told reporters at Confederation Building Wednesday. "We don't know that information today, we don't have the actual numbers."

Jones said the threat of litigation is putting the government in a "vulnerable" position. Last year, a Newfoundland Supreme Court judge cleared the way for a class-action lawsuit over faulty cancer testing.

"This is the same government (that), earlier on in this issue, said that government has to balance the possibility of litigation against the right of the public to know," she said.

"That's the same model they're still adapting. If they weren't, they'd be telling us today the numbers of

people that were directly affected, that had directly died as a result of wrong testing and wrong treatment."

NDP Leader Lorraine Michael agreed.

Wiseman announced this week that ER/PR results for 108 deceased patients changed when sent for retesting.

He stressed that does not necessarily mean that appropriate cancer treatment was delayed, or that the incorrect tests were linked to the progression of the disease or death.

Asked Wednesday by reporters whether some of the patients would be alive today if the tests were done correctly, Wiseman said it would be "speculative" and "irresponsible" to respond.

Wiseman and Michael clashed during question period at the House of Assembly.

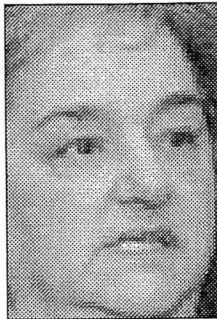
He accused her of playing politics with the issue. She accused him of downplaying the importance of the new numbers.

Wiseman said families could get in contact with officials for more information on the specific cause of death of their relative, and to personally contact his office if they have trouble obtaining that information.

The minister stressed that he wants the commission of inquiry to do its work. The Cameron Inquiry held its first day of hearings on Wednesday.



Yvonne Jones



Lorraine Michael

"I'm sure that one of the things on the government's mind is litigation," Michael said. "That's fine and dandy; maybe they have lawyers talking to them about that. But the thing is, this information has to become public anyway, so why not give it out (now)?"

She said she was disturbed about Health Minister Ross Wiseman's comments on the issue.

"We can't be definitive about any of this, right? But if the government wants to be open and honest as it says it wants to be, then I think people have to know whether or not they died from cancer."

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