

Health issues dominate question period

By DAVE BARTLETT

THE TELEGRAM

The minister of health answered the bulk of questions from the opposition during question period on Tuesday.

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones asked Minister Ross Wiseman if he would broaden the coverage of a kidney cancer drug to a small group of liver cancer patients who also take the drug, but must pay for it themselves.

Jones said the drug Nexavar costs about \$6,000 a month and less than 10 people in the province take it for liver cancer.

She also said other provinces approve it on a case-by-case basis.

Wiseman said a national review panel is looking at whether or not the drug should be approved for liver cancer patients and he wouldn't change anything until that panel completes its work.

Jones then asked Wiseman what he was doing about a severe shortage of urologists in the province.

Wiseman said a urologist was supposed to be coming to St. John's in September, but that doctor has just advised Eastern Health that he won't be coming.

He said because of that, Eastern Health has beefed up its recruitment drive, hired a recruiting agency, and will send urology patients out of the province in the short term.

Jones said 60 per cent of the urology positions in the province are vacant. Outside the House she said there are 300 people on a wait list and those people must wait more than two months to see a urologist.

The Liberals then asked the minister what he had done about a letter sent to his department in February

from the four regional health authorities asking that midwifery be a self-regulating profession and licensed by the government.

"In order for any profession to practise in Newfoundland and Labrador, they need to be regulated," replied Wiseman.

He said for that to happen, legislation needs to be in place to govern health professionals such as midwives.

"It's our intention to look at umbrella legislation to cover off a variety of health disciplines and I hope to be in a position to move that agenda forward some time this fall," Wiseman said.

The NDP asked Wiseman about comments made by at least four Eastern Health officials at the Cameron Inquiry.

Leader Lorraine Michael said the witnesses said the amalgamation of several smaller boards which formed Eastern Health should have been overseen by a dedicated transition team.

Michael asked the minister to create such a team now to finish the mergers of the current four regional health boards.

But Wiseman said witnesses at the inquiry have used words like in retrospect and in hindsight and said the transitions are just about complete.

"I am speaking in the present I'm not speaking in retrospect," replied Michael. "I'm speaking out of conversations that I've had in administration in the health authorities."

Wiseman said he met with officials from Eastern Health Tuesday morning and the issue of reorganization was not brought up.