



St. Joseph's General Hospital

Question asked during Oral Question Period of the 26th Legislature of Alberta, 3rd Session from Ms. Laurie Blakeman, Hon. Member from Edmonton-Centre

March 21, 2007



Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's news of shocking oversights at a hospital in Vegreville has Albertans extremely worried. Not only are residents in the area concerned that they may have been affected by improper sterilization practices, but they're worried about this government's failure to alert Albertans in a timely enough fashion to a major health risk. My questions are to the Premier. How long has the Premier been aware that St. Joseph's hospital wasn't meeting standards since they seem to have had a history of problems?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister and I followed the advice of professionals, and that is our public officer of health. They posted, of course, on the doors of the hospital last Friday a public health order, and it's for those people that were going to gain access into the hospital. Over the weekend the Minister of Health met with officials to follow up, and we're doing whatever we can, as quickly as possible to restore the confidence not only in St. Joe's hospital but all hospitals in the province of Alberta.

Ms Blakeman: So the Premier knew at the same time as the public. Again to the Premier. There was a failure on the part of this government to monitor and enforce the situation. There is no doubt that this province is going to face lawsuits from patients that may be infected due to this negligence. Has the Premier begun discussions with cabinet and legal counsel on the scale of this government's liability?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is the kind of behaviour that Albertans find upsetting. First of all, let's assess the situation. The officer of health said: minimum risk. We are going to ask all those that had any service in terms of the hospital, any kind of health care delivery service that were in contact or with the CSR – we're going to make sure that we contact them all, make sure that they're aware of the risk. But to say that we're already anticipating huge court cases, et cetera, is – you know, folks, let's first restore the confidence in the hospital.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I would have called it planning. But again to the Premier: what deadline has the Premier set for the report by the Health Quality Council of Alberta to be completed, and will the Premier commit to making the report public immediately after receiving it?

Mr. Stelmach: The minister will respond to the actual time limit of the Health Quality Council.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I have requested the Health Quality Council to look into all aspects surrounding this situation and report back to me. I have not as yet put a deadline on that process. We need them first to look into what it's going to take. So we will be in discussions with the Health Quality Council leadership this week to talk about the nature and extent of the inquiry and what needs to be done, and we will set appropriate time frames at that time. I want to make sure that the work is done thoroughly and completely. So I'm not going to put artificial deadlines on it, but on the other hand we're going to make sure that they understand that it has to be done as soon as possible.

Alberta Hansard, March 21, 2007 (unofficial transcript)



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Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. MRSA is one of the superbugs now found in many hospitals. The most successful way to prevent this is handwashing before touching patients. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How much of the MRSA infection has been transmitted from St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville to the community? If someone infected with MRSA has gone into the community and, say, served lunch at the local seniors' centre, then it is cycling through the community and back into the hospital. What plans does the minister have to test the local population for this superbug infection?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, an interesting question. First of all, I would say that, of all the admissions to St. Joseph's hospital to my understanding, nobody came into the hospital with MRSA. The other thing I would indicate is, in terms of my discussions with the provincial public health officer, the MRSA infection, although there are some community instances known about it, it is primarily a hospital infection. The question about whether it has been transferred or could have been transferred out into the community is a very interesting one, and I guess what we need to make sure is . . .

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How do we know that the emergency room patients are safe? They were exposed to the same contaminated equipment and unsanitary practices.

Mr. Hancock: What we need to make sure, Mr. Speaker, is that people in the community know and understand the symptoms of MRSA, which are rashes and lesions, and if they have those symptoms, to immediately seek medical attention.

With respect to the sterilization of the equipment: there was an immediate order put in place to stop use of equipment. All the equipment was removed from the hospital and appropriately sterilized. So on the go-forward basis appropriate steps have been taken to make sure that no person attending at the emergency at St. Joseph's hospital would have any concern about the sterilized equipment. That has been taken care of on a go-forward basis.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. A directive by the health region to close the sterilization room on February 13th was violated by the hospital for a month. Can the minister determine what went wrong here? I don't want to wait months for a Health Quality Council report. Is it a default in monitoring or in enforcement?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, precisely the reason why we're moving ahead today to put in place a plan and a board of management to take control of the management of that institution under the Hospitals Act is because that's the appropriate methodology in this type of institution. If that board of management is not successful in making sure that we can have total assurance of the quality of management and operation of that facility, then a supervisor can be appointed after the board of management is in place. But that's precisely why we've moved to the board of management so that we know with certainty that directives of this nature are being followed and that all appropriate protocols are being followed in that particular hospital.

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