

April 13, 2007

VIA FAX (613) 941-6900

The Honourable Steven Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

Earlier this week, the False Creek clinic in Vancouver reopened its urgent care centre, making it the latest in a string of private clinics that allow patients to jump the queue, all with the apparent blessing of the federal government. Your Minister of Health, Tony Clement, told the *Edmonton Journal* that he is not concerned because this model already exists in Canada. I am writing on behalf of 560,000 members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees to tell you that Canadians are concerned, and that we expect you to uphold the *Canada Health Act* and equal access to care.

The False Creek Urgent Care Centre provides faster access to patients who can afford to pay out-of-pocket, and if those patients need follow-up in the public system, they will have jumped the queue. This violates the *Canada Health Act*, and it violates the trust we put in our federal government.

One year ago, you wrote to the Alberta government asserting that equal access to health care is a fundamental Canadian principle and one that your government would defend. In your own words, "citizens want faster access ... but access should also be equitable and not determined by a person's ability to pay". In Vancouver and Montreal and other cities where private clinics are expanding, a person's wealth is indeed determining access to health care, and you are doing nothing to defend equal access. In fact, by your endorsement of Quebec's Bill 33, by your silence on *Canada Health Act* violations, and by your "care guarantee" that provinces can use to justify contracting-out, you are actively inviting privatization and two-tier health care.

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Again last year, your government failed to demand adequate reporting on the *Canada Health Act*, and your penalties for violations were paltry. On wait lists, instead of implementing the recommendations of Dr. Brian Postl and supporting public sector solutions, you've endorsed the Quebec model of a care guarantee that uses private clinics to deliver insured services.

The False Creek clinic is charging user fees for medically necessary services. Clinics in Quebec, by your own Health Minister's admission, are doing the same thing. The clinic owners may have found loopholes in provincial regulation, but they are counting on the federal government throwing in the towel on the *Canada Health Act*. In fact, they seem gleeful as they dare your government to intervene, as if health care privatization is just a playground tussle. With Minister Clement dismissing public concerns, making patronizing comments like "this is not the sky falling", and electioneering with the gimmick of a care guarantee, we certainly get the impression that Medicare is a game for Ottawa.

If you want to regain any credibility with the Canadian public on health care, you must immediately investigate the False Creek clinic, Quebec private clinics, and other for-profits delivering medically necessary services. When you find queue-jumping and other violations of Medicare principles, you must financially penalize those provinces and call for immediate closure of the offending clinics.

We await this demonstration that your government takes equal access to health care seriously.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Moist." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

PAUL MOIST
National President

cc: The Honourable Tony Clement, Federal Minister of Health
The Honourable George Abbott, British Columbia Minister of Health

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