

MAR 12 2007

p. 105



Eastern Health

Department of Laboratory Medicine
March 8, 2007

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Pathology

Mr. John Abbott
Deputy Minister
Department of Health & Community Services
P.O.Box 8700
St. John's, NL, A1B 4J6

Dear Mr. Abbott:

Re: **Recruitment and Retention of Pathologists**

As per our recent conversation, I am writing you and Minister Wiseman, to reinforce the issues regarding recruitment and retention of Pathologists in NL. We have communicated this problem over the last three years with the Department of Health. The document generated by the external reviewer, retained by Government, has also addressed this issue in detail.

Our current staffing in St. John's Hospitals is below the optimum to guarantee proper patient care. We are currently short of 4 pathologists, with the fifth one departing on March 30, 07. Dr. Fontaine, Director of Cytopathology, postponed his resignation till June 22, pending the outcome of the negotiations of the pathology group and Government. This will result in a shortfall of over 30% for St. John's Hospitals. The situation outside St. John's is even more serious with only one pathologist left in Clarenville and one in Gander. There is a resignation in Corner Brook.

We are currently interviewing some of the candidates for the vacant positions. It is our handicap that we cannot compete or offer any of these candidates what the rest of the Canadian Provinces are offering. You have to understand, as I am sure you do, that the current remuneration is the biggest stumbling block that we must overcome in order to recruit good candidates, which will assure proper and timely delivery of patient care.

All four residents who graduated from our program in June 2006 have been lost to other provinces. The main reason is the pay which is significantly less (more than 100%) than other provinces which are actively recruiting our residents. The letter from one of the pathologists, a former resident, that I forwarded to your office, is a true testament to this. Isn't it in the best interest of this Government to retain these physicians that the Government of NL and all of us have invested in?

-2-

This situation has impacted the morale of the physicians (pathologists) who decided to stay and continue their practice. I am sure that the number will continue to recede.

While already in crisis, any further deterioration of manpower can result in consequences that may be beyond repair. Unfortunately the most recent problem in testing of ER and PR of breast cancer patient and future delivery of sub-specialty pathology service to patient care depends on proper resources such as manpower.

You know that our work is mostly related to cancer diagnostics, and the patient care of this most vulnerable population depends on quality and timely generated pathology reports. The testimonies of our clinical colleagues and importance of our work to the cancer patient care has been addressed to your office by the representatives of Oncology and Surgery Departments in person or writing on several occasions.

The Oncology Bonus that we requested as a minimum supplement to a current remuneration package is equally deserved by pathologists as it is deserved by the other groups which are receiving it. It will help to stabilize the current pathology group and attract new "blood" to our Program. We are seeking a prompt resolution of these serious issues by Government.

Sincerely yours,



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c.c. Hon. Ross Wiseman, Minister for Health and Community Services
Premier Danny Williams
Hon. T. Marshall, Minister of Finance
Mr. Rob Ritter, Executive Director, NLMA