

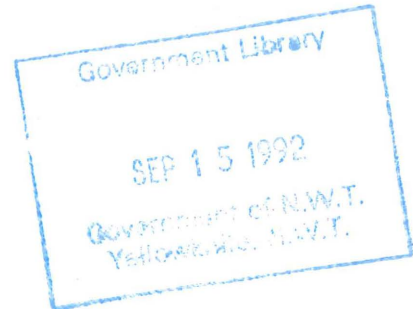


Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly  
Member for Thebacha

TABLED DOCUMENT NO. 82 - 12 (2) TABLED ON SEP 10 1992

11 September 1992.

THE HONOURABLE DENNIS PATTERSON, M.L.A.,  
MINISTER OF HEALTH.



### Fort Smith Health Centre Crisis

Your response to my correspondence of September 4 did not surprise me. However, some of comments in your reply, dated September 10, are of an extremely serious nature and I simply cannot allow them to remain without further response.

Your correspondence makes reference to your perception that there have been *"efforts by Dr. Viswalingham to thwart resolution of the matter within the Health Centre, which have contributed substantially to the necessity for a Board of Inquiry under the Medical Profession Act.*

This differs greatly from my perspective. I would wish you to provide me with a written summary of the activities undertaken by Dr. Viswalingham which you believe to have been intentionally directed toward "thwarting" the resolution of this matter.

Further in your memorandum, you have referred to your decision to establish a Public Administrator for the Health Centre and state that this is based on *the unwillingness or inability of the Board to deal with the serious matters relating to medical practice at the Fort Smith Health Centre*".

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It is this kind of statement that has been causing trouble for the people of my constituency. The thoughtless tossing out of references to "*serious matters relating to medical practice*" has led to a loss of confidence within the community about the operation of the Health Centre. What are the serious matters, Mr. Patterson? How are they affecting the delivery of quality medical care at our only clinic? These are the questions that my constituents would like answered. Certainly, Dr. Viswalingham's situation is not the only matter that requires attention at the Health Centre. A Public Inquiry is the way to address the over-all issue of the quality of medical care.

That is why your comment that "*neither you nor I, or for that matter the residents of Fort Smith, have the ability, as non-physicians, to assess this issue* (ie., the report of a peer review) makes absolutely no sense at all.

While it would likely require one physician to assess another's breadth of knowledge or technical practise, this is not what is at issue here. What is at issue is the concern that people of Fort Smith now have in the sort of medical care and quality of service that is delivered at the Health Centre. I take serious exception to your presumption that *only* the medical profession can determine whether the people of my community are receiving the service they need from their Health Centre. We are quite capable of making that judgment ourselves, thank you.

In many ways, I think your comments are indicative of the problem with health care in the Northwest Territories. Ever since the health transfer, the Department of Health has assumed that only the medical profession, almost exclusively non-native and short-term residents, has the answers and finds the solutions. This has been an experience that is not unique to my constituency. You can see it in the relationships which exist between the Department and Regional Health and hospital boards all across the Northwest Territories.

Your reference to my decision to make "*the secretive nature of the Board of Inquiry an issue*" is silly. This was made an issue when, without consultation with your own Public Administrator or the courtesy of even informing me, you went ahead and issued an announcement that you would form a Board of Inquiry. The Board is limited to addressing a report completed by outsiders from Saskatchewan. This report was completed under *Terms of Reference* which specifically require that it must remain confidential. Of course, an assumption would be made by my constituents -- and everyone else -- that this Board would carry out its review behind closed doors. It is "*an issue*" because my constituents have asked me to assure that matters at the Health Centre are not covered up. You have been simply unable to provide me with that assurance.

Your attempt at a blanket invocation of the *sub judice* convention has further raised queries about whether people will be able to hear accurate information on the matter.

Finally, I would note your comment that I "*have allowed (my) attention to be diverted from the primary issue; i.e. the allegations of lack of competency to practise*".

You are incorrect. that is not the primary issue, and it troubles me to see that your office is so focused on the scapegoating of a single individual over problems that have developed over years and years of Departmental neglect and mismanagement of the Board of Management's approach to operating the Health Centre.

The primary issue is unquestionably "the administration and quality of medical services provided to residents of Fort Smith", not just Dr. Viswalingham's so-called "*lack of competency to practise*".

This a large issue and one in which the public is a major and obligatory stakeholder. The *Public Inquiries Act* was enacted to provide for just such a situation. I am once again requesting that you reconsider my request for an inquiry under Section 2 of the *Public Inquiries Act*.

Jeannie Marie-Jewell,  
M.L.A., Thebacha.

