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May 31, 2016

Terry Lake
Minister of Health
PO Box 9050 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria BC, V8W9E2

Dear Minister:

I am writing to urge you to follow the lead of health officials in Alberta and investigate the actions of the Copeman clinics in West Vancouver and Vancouver and other similar clinics.

As you are aware, these clinics have come under scrutiny in Calgary recently when journalists revealed allegations that the clinics may have been engaging in practices such as over-testing patients – with bills going to the public system – and excessive billing. The Alberta health ministry has directed its Special Investigation Unit to investigate and determine if these practices violate the Canada Health Act and Alberta law.

Public health care advocates have been raising concerns about the B.C. operations of these clinics since 2006, when it came to light they were charging fees for patients to be "members." The practices are not dissimilar to those which have raised concerns in Alberta, which is hardly surprising, given the Alberta clinics are directed from the head office in Vancouver. We think this should be the impetus to lead your ministry to launch a thorough investigation into the practices of the B.C. clinics.

As you're aware, the BC Medicare Protection Act has several provisions which restrict the actions of private clinics. Section 14 allows doctors to opt out and direct-bill the patient, but doctors may not bill both the patient and the Medical Services Plan for the same service, and must not bill above the agreed rate. Sections 17 and 18 restrict extra billing. Section 45 restricts doctors from charging private insurers for services covered by the public plan.

Public health care is at stake. British Columbians have long rejected two-tier, U.S. style medicine in this province and we are concerned about the growth of for-profit medicine. While your ministry relies on private clinics to perform surgeries that should be done in the public

system, and contemplates an end to the restrictions on overnight stays at those clinics, all the while public operating rooms in this province go under-utilized, or in some cases, not utilized at all. All of this could be compounded with trade deals giving foreign firms access to a Canadian public health care system that governments have allowed to be a "marketplace."

The Copeman clinics in Alberta are directed from their head office in Vancouver, and as such it is conceivable that actions that raised alarm bells in Calgary are taking place in British Columbia as well. As the steward of public health care in this province, your ministry has a duty to ensure that access to health care does not depend on the ability to pay. I trust you will treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Judy Darcy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long vertical tail on the letter 'y'.

Judy Darcy, MLA
Official Opposition Spokesperson for Health