

For Immediate Release
September 7, 2006

PATIENTS SUFFER LONGER WAIT TIMES AS ABBOTT TURNS BLIND EYE

VICTORIA – Health Minister George Abbott has admitted that illegal and unethical queue jumping is happening under his watch, which raises serious concerns about his ability to protect B.C.'s public health care system as wait lists continue to soar, NDP Health Critic Adrian Dix said today.

In March 2006, Hanif Kahn was placed on a nine month waiting list for a medically necessary MRI scan. During the wait, his family was told that they could pay \$1300 to have the procedure done in a matter of days by the False Creek Surgical Centre. The procedure would be done at St. Paul's Hospital, a public facility.

Dix said that Mr. Kahn's case is not unusual. Other patients inquiring about MRIs through the private facility have been told that they can pay to get the procedure done at St. Paul's as well.

"This is queue jumping and the B.C. Liberal government has allowed it to happen," said Dix. "This has been going on in the open, not in secret. The government has tacitly approved queue jumping for months, which is a clear infraction of the principles of the *Canada Health Act* and B.C.'s *Medicare Protection Act*."

Dix added that B.C. Liberal policies have resulted in a growing backlog of patients waiting for MRI results. The government's policy to limit funding for the machines to operate is in effect encouraging the public system to sell the unused time to private facilities for medically necessary procedures.

"This was a deliberate public policy move by this government," said Dix. "The B.C. Liberals have forced the public system to ration and sell off health care services to make up for their failures. The result is that wait lists keep growing and more patients have to suffer longer."

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