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## **PROVINCES DON'T SUPPORT 'CARE GUARANTEES': MANITOBA HEALTH MINISTER**

**BY DENNIS BUECKERT, FROM CANADIAN PRESS**

Provincial health ministers don't support wait-time guarantees, says Manitoba Health Minister Tim Sale.

It's the first time a provincial spokesman has spoken about health-care waiting time guarantees since they were promised by both Liberals and Conservatives in the election campaign.

The idea behind such guarantees is patients would be sent to other provinces or even the United States, expenses paid, if they can't get timely care at home for certain procedures.

Health ministers have thoroughly discussed care guarantees over the last year and all opposed it, said Sale, interviewed yesterday at a conference on wait times.

"I think there was very close to unanimity that the care guarantee was not an appropriate component of a waiting-list strategy.

"The capacity is just not there in any of our systems where the most pain is -- hips and knees (replacement) or diagnostic imaging. Nobody's got extra capacity so who's going to do the care?"

The Conservatives say care guarantees would be financed from a waiting-times fund in the 2004 federal-provincial health accord. But the 2004 accord makes no mention of care guarantees, and it could not be unilaterally rewritten.

The Liberals have allocated \$75 million as a one-time expense to implement care guarantees, but it's not clear how that amount was calculated or whether it would be sufficient.

Sale, a New Democrat, said he was not commenting on any party's platform, but on the general feasibility of care guarantees.

Manitoba couldn't send hip and knee patients to another province without bumping patients on that province's own waiting list, he said.

"That just makes the problem worse in the receiving jurisdiction."

Provinces do send patients elsewhere if it is a life-and-death matter, but not for routine care.

"The cost of sending someone out is crippling for most of these things. I don't see how care guarantees can even be implemented in any kind of just way."

Others attending the conference also had concerns about care guarantees.

Martha Jackman, a University of Ottawa law professor, said guarantees would provide an ideal opening for private-care firms hoping to exploit Canada's \$100-billion health-care system.

"Private providers are providing for-profit care, but they're being paid by the state. There's no bad debtors. It's even better than the United States because you're always assured you're going to be paid."

She said the real solution to long waits is in reinforcing the basics of good health, such as safe water and good housing.

Several speakers said the emphasis on wait times has led health system managers to focus on a few acute procedures while neglecting chronic disease and prevention programs.

Mike McBane of Canadian Health Coalition, which sponsored the conference, said the focus on wait times is driven by polling.

"It's a false solution. We want them to be committing themselves to the full range of services including prevention and promotion and appropriate care."