



January 14, 2009

Open Letter to Premier Dennis Fentie

Re: Watson Lake Hospital Transfer

Dear Premier Fentie:

The staff at the Watson Lake Hospital received notification recently that your government intended to transfer control of the facility to the Yukon Hospital Corporation. This news was greeted with surprise and dismay by hospital staff and members of the community. The unilateral decision to fundamentally change the delivery of rural medical services in Watson Lake raises a plethora of issues, not the least of which is the utter lack of consultation with the stakeholders.

In spite of your government's failure to solicit input – a particularly curious decision in light of the fact that Watson Lake is your own riding – the hospital staff and community members have taken the initiative to ensure your government is aware of the widespread opposition to the plan. The Watson Lake Hospital and Health Centre staff have prepared nine pages of unaddressed issues and questions; a petition is circulating in the community expressing opposition to the transfer; and, a written objection to the government's failure to consult with the community has been sent by the Watson Lake Chamber of Commerce.

A well researched and insightful submission by the Watson Lake Hospital and Health Centre staff entitled *Our Vision for Excellent Health Care Delivery in Watson Lake* has been submitted to your officials. This document details why the move will not be in the best interest of quality health care in the community, and offers constructive alternative ideas to improve health care delivery.

In addition to questions about process and quality of care, the Yukon Employees' Union sees numerous fundamental issues relating to the employment of our members. The action by your government conflicts with existing collective agreements, raises questions of legality, and endangers the job security and negotiated rights of our members.

The Yukon government employer has provided no written guarantees, nor addressed the issues of pensions, benefits accruals, seniority, shift scheduling, overtime, job description changes, classification appeal processes, employment of Home Care Attendants, records management conflicts, patient file-sharing protocols, co-operative arrangements with health service, rural nurse 'borrowing' procedures and staff housing.

The transfer will result in significant collective agreement conflicts (three separate collective agreements are in place). Issues will also arise because terms of employment are established under different legislation. Nurses employed at the Watson Lake facility are covered under terms of the *Public Service Labour Relations Act*. WGH nurses are governed by the *Canada Labour Code*. Your government would either have to negotiate three separate collective agreements with the potential for drawn out bargaining processes, or attempt to merge the employees under one agreement. This latter approach would encounter even more obstacles.

The transfer is nothing more than an attempt to contract out the services in Watson Lake to the Yukon General Hospital. Provisions of the Public Service Transfer Agreement apply. In order to include all staff in Watson Lake as employees of the WGH, it would be necessary to terminate their employment. This is specifically prohibited under the terms of PSAC-YTG current collective agreements. The Yukon government is well aware of this, because your negotiators attempted to remove PSTA provisions from the collective agreement during negotiations, but failed.

The only way to affect such a transfer would be to override the terms of fairly negotiated collective agreements, which your own government ratified. This would require a legislative change. Is your government really prepared to develop and pass legislation that will override the negotiated terms of agreements which your own representatives approved? The ramifications of such an action would carry serious consequences during future negotiations by destroying all good faith in the process.

We urge you to reconsider the transfer of the Watson Lake Hospital to the Yukon Hospital Corporation, and to give consideration to the expressed opinions and thoughtful ideas presented by the professionals at the Watson Lake facility and the community at large.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Loralee Kesler". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Loralee Kesler, Vice-President
Yukon Employees' Union