

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE
QUESTION 47-19(2): ULTRASOUND POLICY AT STANTON TERRITORIAL
HOSPITAL

February 11, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Can the Minister tell this House what the current policy and practice is for ultrasounds at Stanton Territorial Hospital with regard to family members being present during the procedure? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. DIANE THOM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently, family members and support persons are being allowed into the ultrasound room, unless there is a specific medical reason for which this would not be appropriate. Stanton has committed to continue to monitor the situation to ensure that this approach is being applied consistently. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that, because I have a constituent who confirmed to me as recently as December that was not the case, so I look forward to the Minister carrying out the new practice. In July 2019, the practice of allowing family members was changed so that family members could not be in the same room as a patient who was getting an ultrasound, so why was that practice changed in July of 2019?

HON. DIANE THOM: The change was based on updated Sonography Canada Professional Practice Guidelines and feedback from the diagnostic imaging staff. This approach is evolving to become the standard practice in Canada and, at the time it was implemented, it was viewed by the diagnostic imaging department to be an internal procedural change. It is recognized, however, that this was short-sighted and did not necessarily anticipate the viewpoint and concerns of the public. As such, Stanton has committed to properly engage with practitioners, patients, and community stakeholders to discuss the intent of the practice change and impact that it may have. Ultrasounds are medical exams that require full attention of the sonographers. Additional people in the room can make the exam more challenging. The intention was to allow the sonographer to complete the medical portion of the exam first, before inviting the patient's family into the room to show them and provide them with a photo of the baby.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that explanation. Look, it's great that are staff are -- and I know that they work very hard at Stanton Hospital, but clearly, when a policy like this is decided internally, it's probably not in the best interests of the patients. I have reviewed the Sonography Canada Professional Practice Guidelines; in fact, I quoted from them in my Member's statement. They were released in September of 2018, and there was nothing in there about northern healthcare or any specific guidance to exclude family members during an ultrasound. Would the Minister confirm that the guidelines that I just referenced, and she has referenced, do not prevent family members from being present during an ultrasound?

HON. DIANE THOM: Sonography Canada Professional Practice Guidelines are considered a best practice source of information to inform and to guide the development and/or revision of the NTSSA policies and procedures with respect to the provisions of ultrasound in Stanton and throughout the NTSSA.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary, Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Clearly, the practice of excluding family members during an ultrasound is contrary to Best Health, Best Care, for a Better Future; that's the vision of the strategic plan we have in place for the NWT health and social services system, and the concept of cultural safety. There is nothing in the guidelines that prevent family members from being there, so what is the Minister going to do in terms of developing a policy for chaperones for patients undergoing an ultrasound in the NWT, and how soon will we see that in place? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE THOM: Stanton's diagnostic imaging department will be working to engage and communicate this change to external stakeholders, such as practitioners, patients, and community stakeholders, such as the Centering Pregnancy Program, to ensure that all points of view are captured. This engagement in communication is expected to be completed in spring 2020, and feedback obtained will be taken into consideration when developing policy that allows the sonographer to complete the obstetrical ultrasound in a manner that allows them to provide the best medical results and patient care. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.