

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 432-19(2): MIDWIFERY PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

October 28, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. I have detailed a number of delays hobbling the effort to get the long-promised territorial midwifery program in place. A common thread appears to be, in all of these delays, difficulty in staff recruitment. Can the Minister tell us when a recruitment and retention strategy for midwifery will finally be completed? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That strategy will be complete in the spring of 2021. Thank you.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. I look forward to seeing that document. The update that was supplied to me in August said, "Territorial leadership positions will undertake policy and guideline development and will develop data collection and reporting mechanisms consistent with the approved monitoring and evaluation framework." It's hard to believe that we've been running a program for more than five years without data reporting, collection, monitoring, or evaluation. Can the Minister tell us when the required policy and guideline development is going to be completed?

HON. JULIE GREEN: The policy and guideline development is an ongoing process. It doesn't impede the development of the territorial midwifery program, so they are developing together.

MR. O'REILLY: I am still kind of baffled at how we can have a program that is developing without data, but a further element that is being worked on, of course, is staffing. A territorial manager is now hired. They are going to work with regional authorities. Again, a basic building block that we need to have in place is things like credentialing, performance review, response to complaints. Can the Minister tell us when the work will be completed on setting procedures for proper qualifications for midwifery staff, their performance, and a complaint procedure?

HON. JULIE GREEN: It's my understanding that the new territorial midwifery manager is working on all of these things. There is a standard job description for all registered midwives that is part of the regulatory framework that has already been established, and further, the NTHSSA bylaws have a process for reviewing performance of professional staff. This is the same process that would be used for midwives, as well.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. Of course, no aspect of government service delivery is free of the shadow of COVID, particularly health service delivery. We know midwifery consultation in the South Slave and Deh Cho is on hold, pending COVID. Can the Minister briefly summarize what impacts COVID has had on midwifery implementation and when we will finally have a full, territorial midwifery program? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: An example of the impact of COVID on this program is that, when the territorial manager of midwifery arrived in the territory in March, right at the outset of the pandemic, rather than being asked to sit and write policy, she was redeployed to support clinical care to postpartum and newborn clients at Stanton Hospital and in the community. That, I don't think, is in place any longer. I think she is back to her regular job at this point, but that was an example of where things were at.

As the Member is aware, the midwifery expansion project did not receive funding in the 2021 budget year, and there is no request for funding in the next budget year. This is a question of competing priorities. The department has a number of initiatives through the mandate to complete, and this kind of new initiative money has been allocated to the child and youth counsellor positions and to Children and Family Services' needs. Thank you.