

TOP ISLAND STORY



Man dealing with disease takes case to legislature

Engineer with cancer upset at delays in his treatment

By Wayne Thibodeau
The Guardian

A P.E.I. man who has been waiting months for cancer care took his concerns to the legislature Thursday.

Bob Norburn of Charlottetown was diagnosed with prostate cancer four months ago. The 59-year-old aerospace engineer has seen an oncologist but continues to wait for critical tests.

Norburn believes that while he waits, his cancer is spreading.

"I am not prepared to die quietly, I am just not going to fade away," Norburn told The Guardian.

"I'm not getting any care. I'm not getting any medication. I'm not getting any treatment plan. I'm told to come back in two to three months time and we'll see how you are now. It's not an ingrown toenail that might grow out.

"This is getting a greater grip on me every day that I wake up. Every day I wake up I've got more cancer than I had yesterday."

Norburn held a silent vigil in front of Province House Thursday.

He walked quietly in front of the P.E.I. legislature with a bright yellow sign that read: "Suffering from Cancer. Dying from Neglect."

He's taken his concerns directly to Health Minister Chester Gillan but so far he hasn't received a reply.

Gillan said nobody in P.E.I. should have to wait four weeks to get cancer care.

Gillan went back to the legislative chamber and came back with briefing notes prepared by his staff which shows that Islanders who have been diagnosed with cancer wait, on average, two weeks for treatment.

The Health minister said he could not comment on Norburn's case specifically. Physicians, not politicians, design treatment plans, he added.

"For emergencies they are taken within a two-week period," said Gillan. "It's pretty well right away."

Norburn said that hasn't been the case with him and he believes the problem is an overworked medical community. He said he's waiting five hours in a medical clinic waiting room to see a physician.

He has a physician but that still doesn't curb the wait times to see his family physician, or to see the specialists he believes he needs to save his life.

"If that's the best the Health minister can do, it's time for him to step aside," he said.

In 2006, about 20,000 men in Canada will be diagnosed with prostate cancer.

About 4,200 of them will die.

Norburn's rugged exterior shields the fear he holds inside.

When asked if he was scared about his future, Norburn's eyes fill with tears.

His voice cracks and he talks about his future, a future he feels is uncertain at best.

"How do you think it feels to wake up every morning and think that I have more cancer today than I had yesterday, a creeping disease that creeps through your body and inevitably kills people off? I'm probably going to die but I am not going to die quietly."