

## Consumer ADVOCARE Network

### Call for Overhaul of Medical Laboratory Testing System

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Just because patients haven't been speaking out about the need for major changes in Ontario's lab testing system doesn't mean they aren't being harmed.

- Paula E., age 66, having fasted for 12 hours prior to her blood tests, fainted after waiting for two hours. She didn't get the tests and was given an appointment to try again two weeks later.
- The pediatrician for Robert and Kathryn J's one-year-old daughter suspected a genetic disorder. The nearest lab that offered the genetic testing was six hours away with a waiting time of 12 agonizing weeks.
- Janice's 68-year-old mother, diagnosed with cardiovascular disease and diabetes, has been developing progressive memory loss, slight tremors, and digestive problems. The GP has ordered a battery of lab tests, none of which have been done. Janice says her mother refuses to comply, stating, "there are too many tests spread across too many sites and would require Janice to take too much time off work and besides I did a bunch last year and have no idea what they were testing for."

What patients and families are just beginning to realize is that problems like these impact the quality of healthcare for hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of Ontarians every year. This is because our outdated and repressive laboratory testing system has not been changed since the 1990's. There are clear indications that the current system is costing both the healthcare system and patients in terms of time, money and, ultimately, health and well-being.

It is almost inconceivable, in an era when openness and transparency are the hallmarks of good governance and accountability to the taxpayers, that tightly controlled lab policies, unchanged since the 1990's, have remained hidden. What don't most patients know?

- Community testing laboratories are allocated fixed market shares and "capped" budgets, which eliminates incentives to improve patient service or to introduce much needed innovation in testing;
- There are no incentives for introducing new test technology and no evaluation of current technology to assure they are the most appropriate for current needs;
- House-bound and senior citizens in nursing homes and residences are frequently charged out of pocket for testing that Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-term Care is also funding
- Ontario is the only province where hospitals are not providing testing services for community-based patients

It is not an overstatement that current laboratory testing policies favour the large private labs (which continue to protest any need for reform) and disadvantage the smaller community-based labs and the public lab system.

The lack of reform, in the end, actually harms all Ontario patients. It is time that Ontarians are made fully aware of the dysfunction and inefficiency in our current policies. At a time when the Liberal government and Minister Hoskins are heavily promoting “Patients First, Ontario’s Action Plan for Healthcare”, the patients and families call for a comprehensive reform of Ontario’s medical laboratory testing system in a timely, transparent, and fully patient-engaged process that would indeed put Patients First.

*Posted by*

Durhane Wong-Rieger  
Chair, Consumer Advocare Network  
Contact:  
[durhane@sympatico.ca](mailto:durhane@sympatico.ca)  
416-969-7435