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Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

ORAL QUESTIONS

Medical Isotopes

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the government insists that it has access to international medical isotope supplies. But yesterday, the president of Quebec's association of nuclear medicine specialists said that up to 12,000 patients in Quebec, and just in Quebec, were experiencing increased wait times for heart and cancer tests because of the isotope shortage.

Why are the Conservatives misleading Canadians?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, the contingency measures and strategies being used by doctors include triaging patients to ensure that when alternatives are not available they can receive TC99 isotopes. They are also working flexible hours so that when they do receive TC99 isotopes they can maximize their use and minimize the delays.

Using alternatives wherever possible was one of the alternatives identified by the medical experts on isotopes as lessons learned in 2007, and those options, such as thallium, which is very effective in this case, are available to the provinces and territories.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that waiting lists for cardiac and cancer tests are growing longer every day. Medical isotope supplies in Quebec are down to 20%. Hospitals in Ottawa and Manitoba will soon run out.

For days we have been asking specific questions of this government that Canadians want answered, but this government will not give us basic information. Why can it not answer these simple questions?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, again, as we deal with the shortage of TC99, alternatives are available.

Let me repeat what I said yesterday. Fifty per cent of the uses of TC99 isotopes are for heart scans. Thallium can be used as an alternative in many of these cases, and that is available now. The next largest use of TC99 isotopes is for bone scanning. Again, there is an alternative, sodium fluoride, which can be used in these cases, and it is available now.

These alternatives were identified by medical experts on isotopes and we are making sure they are available.