

Attention News Editors: For immediate release
Ontario uncaps Avastin funding in wake of Ombudsman probe

TORONTO (November 29, 2009) – Ontario Ombudsman André Marin today welcomed the province’s announcement that it will uncap the funding of Avastin for colorectal cancer patients. Mr. Marin recommended that the “absurd and indefensible” cap be lifted two months ago in his report, *A Vast Injustice*.

“I’m pleased that the province has agreed to do the right thing for these patients,” said Mr. Marin, who met with Deb Matthews, the new Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, after her appointment in October to reiterate his recommendation to lift the cap. “Of all the provinces that fund Avastin, Ontario has now gone from being the worst to one of the first.”

An investigation conducted by the Special Ombudsman Response Team (SORT) revealed that Ontario was the only province that arbitrarily cut off Avastin funding after 16 cycles, regardless of patients’ progress, and contrary to standard medical practice. Patients who had arrested their tumour growth with Avastin were forced to find their own way to pay for it after 16 cycles, or await their fate.

As of today, the province will cover the cost of the drug up to 24 cycles for patients whose disease has not progressed – and may extend it further if advised by a patient’s doctor.

Mr. Marin noted that when his report was first released, the Ministry was embroiled in the e-Health controversy. “At the time, the Ministry was in a chaotic state. I went back at the issue once cooler heads prevailed.” It’s the first time the Ombudsman has “rejected” the province’s response to his recommendations and asked it to reconsider, he said.

“I was confident that if the Ministry leadership gave the report due consideration, they would see that the old policy was unfair and unsupported by science. Money was never the issue – a fresh set of eyes was all that was needed to see that the case for helping these vulnerable patients was clear,” he said.

The investigation is the 22nd conducted by SORT since Mr. Marin’s appointment in 2005. The vast majority of the Ombudsman’s recommendations in such cases have been implemented, including reforms to newborn screening, property tax assessment and the lottery system.

A Vast Injustice and other related materials can be found at www.ombudsman.on.ca.

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