



Government of the Northwest Territories Response to
Motion 49-20(1): Compassionate Medical Evacuation Policy

Motion

WHEREAS the transport of patients via emergency ground, air ambulance and highway rescue to health facilities does not fall under the Government of the Northwest Territories Medical Travel, and there is no current policy basis or provision possible for non-medical escort or supports provided to these patients;

AND WHEREAS promoting, protecting and providing for the health and well-being of the people of the Northwest Territories is the mandate of the Health and Social Services Establishment Policy;

AND WHEREAS patients receiving emergency care can benefit from having the support of family or friends while they receive emergency transport and medical care;

NOW THEREFORE, I move, seconded by the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, that this Legislative Assembly calls upon the Government of the Northwest Territories to develop and implement a compassionate medical evacuation policy for emergency ground, air ambulance and highway rescue allowing for patients in critical conditions to be accompanied by non-medical escorts.

AND FURTHERMORE, that the Government of the Northwest Territories respond to this motion in 120 days.

GNWT Response

The GNWT acknowledges that during times of high stress caused by unexpected incidents, the family of the individual in care feels their presence is important for the person's recovery.

The necessity to transport an individual by air ambulance usually indicates that the patient is in critical condition and requires immediate transfer to a facility that offers higher-level expertise. The decision to transport a patient is a clinical decision. The GNWT contracts air ambulance services to transport the patient with clinical supports to the nearest facility that provides the care needed.

When a patient is transported by air or ground ambulance to a health care facility or between health care facilities they are in the care of a medical escort (i.e. acute care paramedics) and, as such, are not eligible for a non-medical escort (i.e. a family member) under the Medical Travel Policy,

Air ambulance is a contracted service to provide medically supported, inter-facility transfer. Health care providers within the NWT system prepare the patient for the medevac and then transfer the care to the contracted medical personnel for the inter-facility transfer. The contracted medical personnel have no authority to allow escorts on the air ambulance. Permitting family members to accompany the patient on the air ambulance poses significant risk as space is limited and the medical professionals supporting the transport of the patient need to be able to work if the status of the patient changes in transit.

While the GNWT will not commit to developing a compassionate medical evacuation policy, work is being done to modernize the Medical Travel Policy in a phased approach. This work is focused on ways to better administer the benefit and address elements of cultural safety. Any considerations to expanding benefits will be done in balance with the GNWT's financial sustainability efforts.

The GNWT remains open to dialogue to further strengthen our healthcare system to achieve measurable improvements for our residents.