

BC Cancer Agency's Statement on the Investigation into the patient files of oncologist Dr. Suresh Katakkar formerly of Prince George

The BC Cancer Agency is committed to keeping the public informed while also respecting the privacy and confidentiality of patients.

The following statement is from Dr. Max J. Coppes, President of the BC Cancer Agency regarding the investigation launched in 2012 into patient files of oncologist Dr. Suresh Katakkar, formerly of Prince George.

"In 2011 and 2012, concerns about the medical practice of Dr. Suresh Katakkar were raised with the agency's Vice President of Systemic Therapy. After speaking with Dr. Katakkar it was determined that a full investigation of all of his current patient files was required.

Today we are releasing a review of the findings which can be found on the agency's website www.bccancer.ca. All significant care concerns have been communicated directly to patients and/or family members of deceased patients as the concerns were discovered. Patient safety and quality of care is of utmost concern to the BC Cancer Agency.

The review concluded there were cases of unacceptable standards of care; it was determined that approximately 10 per cent (54 cases) of Dr. Katakkar's total patient caseload was received non-standard and unacceptable levels of care.

Of the 54 cases, it was assessed that eight resulted in serious patient safety events (they involved severe, preventable patient harm) and four were critical patient safety events (they involved potentially preventable, treatment related death). Although the remaining 42 cases received non-standard and unacceptable levels of care it did not appear to result in harm to those patients.

The prevalent issues that emerged from this review are:

1. Misdiagnosis and failure to refer.
2. Use of incorrect protocols causing patient harm.
3. Failure to heed warnings regarding patient safety concerns raised by colleagues.
4. Failure to follow medical standards.

The following contributing factors were identified:

1. Lack of orientation and supervision, including the absence of a performance review.
2. Operating a solo practice, with minimal participation in consultation and case discussion with peers.
3. Workload management was problematic, many action items remained outstanding.
4. Missing and/or incomplete patient documentation.

These are serious findings, and we have forwarded them on to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia for further review.

Medical standards and treatment protocols are fundamental guides for the delivery of care throughout the health care system and are used to protect patients. BC Cancer Agency physicians adhere to these care and treatment protocols to ensure that their patients receive safe prescribing, preparation and administration of their cancer treatments.

The following recommendations were developed as a result of the review:

1. Improve the orientation process for newly hired BC Cancer Agency physicians.
2. Develop additional systems for quality assurance and performance assessment for newly hired and external physicians working at the BC Cancer Agency.
3. Reinforce understanding and adherence to key patient safety policies at the BC Cancer Agency including those outlined in *Commitment to a Culture of Safety* and *Stop the Line*.
4. Collaboratively develop a plan with health authority leaders to ensure a culture of safety is promoted in the Community Oncology Network.
5. Improve the access and capacity for physician and staff consultation for patient case consultation at the Centre for the North by implementing regular interdisciplinary team meetings.
6. Review the BC Cancer Agency oncology documentation and dictation standards.
7. Ensure that quality and safety systems are in place at the Centre for the North, including weekly safety rounds, performing safety audits, participating in quality and safety orientation.
8. Review all of the current BC Cancer Agency Provincial Systemic Therapy Program (PSTP) standards, policies and procedures with the Centre for the North.
9. Provide additional training and resources for Provincial Systemic Therapy Program leaders engaged in the hiring of cancer specialists.

The BC Cancer Agency has accepted and is implementing all of the recommendations.

Additional remarks:

I joined the BC Cancer Agency this past August. Since becoming President, the BC Cancer Agency has undertaken additional steps to ensure patient safety measures are robust across BC. I requested that a further examination of potential patient safety events across all BC Cancer Agency agencies take place, the results were that no patterns or issues of repeat incidents were identified. Also, a new Vice President of Medical Affairs role has been created. The new Vice President will be dedicated to overseeing physician credentialing and performance at the BC Cancer Agency.

I want to express our profound regret over the distress caused by this situation. We have gone to extraordinary lengths to follow up with patients and their families, apologize and ensure they are informed of the situation and offer our complete support should they require it.

I am proud of the BC Cancer Agency's outstanding reputation in cancer care and research and am committed to ensuring the continuous pursuit of improvement and excellence on behalf of patients. By implementing the recommendations generated from the investigation's findings and creating a senior position responsible for medical affairs, patients and their families can be reassured that they are getting safe and quality care from the BC Cancer Agency.

If any patient has concerns about their care they should contact the person providing the care, the manager in charge or the PHSA Patient Quality Care Office 604-877-6000 or 1-800-663-3333 (toll free in BC)."