

REALITY CHECK: Jack Layton did not use private health care

Dr. Brian Day is wrong in saying that Jack Layton used private health care. Media reports quote the incoming head of the Canadian Medical Association unimaginatively repeating the same erroneous statement as has been made by federal Health Minister Tony Clement and other Conservatives to smear the NDP leader.

As the former health minister in Ontario, Clement should know that the Toronto-area Shouldice Clinic is not an example of the spread of private health care.

For his benefit and that of Dr. Day, here are the facts:

- * Jack Layton did not use private health care. The Shouldice Clinic is NOT a private clinic that's undermining Medicare. The procedure was covered by Medicare.
- * In the 1990s Layton was diagnosed with a hernia. Just like every Canadian, he went where his family doctor referred him, and just like every Canadian he paid using his provincial health card.
- * Public health advocacy groups agree: the clinic Layton went to is NOT an example of the expansion of private, for-profit health that we are seeing today. It's the opposite.
- * The Shouldice clinic existed before Medicare. In 1973 it was grandfathered and made part of the public system. Provincial law regulates the operational aspects of the clinic and prevents the family who owns it from expanding or selling it.
- * It shows how the Progressive Conservative government of the day was committed to protecting public Medicare and used legislation to put the brakes on private health profiteering.
- * Compare that to today - Conservatives and Liberals have turned a blind eye to the expansion of private care.

What others have said about the Shouldice clinic:

"They do not surcharge the patient. There are no extra charges of any kind. I have no problem with that." -- former federal health minister Monique Begin, Ottawa Citizen, May 17, 2002

"The Shouldice Hospital is not an example of private health care as an alternative to public health." - Canadian Union of Public Employees, March 2000