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**Cancer clusters probed  
Fort Chipewyan doctor reports high rates of disease**

**Hanneke Brooymans, with files from Archie McLean and Jason Markusoff**

EDMONTON - The Alberta Cancer Board says it hopes to complete a review of cancer cases in the Fort Chipewyan area by the fall.

The board operates the Alberta cancer registry and investigates claims of so-called cancer clusters.

It became involved in the issue shortly after a local physician, John O'Connor, said residents of the community had unusually high rates of blood, colon, bile-duct and liver cancer.

After O'Connor made those claims in 2003 and 2004, the province did a statistical analysis of all cancer cases reported in Fort Chipewyan and found no evidence of elevated cancer rates in the community compared to the Northern Lights Health Region or all of Alberta.

During question period Thursday in the legislature, Liberal MLA Dave Taylor asked Premier Ed Stelmach whether he believes the findings of the original investigation conducted in 2005 were inadequate and superficial. He noted that residents of the community continue to press for satisfactory answers, most recently by staging a protest on the legislature steps.

"The original investigation was done by Alberta Health and Wellness, the federal governments and our Cancer Board, done by professionals, and I expect that the findings they presented were true and accurate," Stelmach replied.

Alberta Health spokesman John Tuckwell said the department would look at the board's report once it's completed, but it's expected the report will support the analysis already done.

Cancer board spokeswoman Lee Elliott said they are working with several partners, including the Nunee Health Board Society up in the Fort Chipewyan area to check the cancer registry and do the background research that's necessary to find out if each death is a confirmed case and attributable to cancer.

"That's quite an arduous process in that you check hospital records, you check lab records and pathology records, and you could be checking death records and vital statistic records and doing everything possible to confirm we've got the right person and the right diagnosis and the right case."

Arthur Noskey, the Grand Chief of Treaty No. 8, said his people would like to broaden their understanding of what is affecting their health. "We would like to know what causes these cancers to be so rampant in our nations."

One of the main concerns is water quality, since the community is downstream of the oilsands operations.

"The concern immediately is the consumption of fish and waterfowl that our First Nations hunt to sustain them," Noskey said. "We'd like to know what the water is doing to those."

"The more insight we have into this process of understanding the contaminants and their effects the better off we'll be."

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