

George Petrunas has a blood cancer called multiple myeloma and because the health care system can't provide him with the treatment he needs to survive, he's been forced to turn to a private clinic.

There's a new drug that could help him that's been approved by Health Canada and is covered by plans in every province except Ontario.

After exhausting all of his treatment options, Petrunas has turned to the Provis Infusion Clinic in Toronto for the medication called Velcade, which costs thousands of dollars per injection.

"It's (Provis) offering help to people who otherwise have none," said Douglas Emerson, whose father is being kept alive by the Velcade treatment. "This isn't about rich and poor, it's about having no other alternative."

All of the drugs Provis provides have been approved by Health Canada, but they must go through a review process for O.H.I.P. coverage and the wait is as long as two months or two years.

According to Provis Chief Operating Officer Graham Vincent, the treatment offered by the clinic is a much cheaper alternative than making the trip across the border.

"It's probably about 40 percent less expensive – that's the general feeling we're getting when we talk to patients," he explained.

An oncologist or a hematologist must refer patients for the infusion treatments.

"My father is alive thanks to this drug, but that doesn't help the scores of other patients and families who are suffering with this disease," Emerson said.

What Is Provis And What Does It Do?

The private clinic provides chemotherapy infusion treatments for cancer patients. Petrunas needs Velcade because myeloma has started to shut down his bone marrow's capacity to create healthy red blood cells.

The Provis treatments are not covered under Ontario's Health Insurance Plan (O.H.I.P.) and the clinic acts in accordance with the Canada Health Act.

What Drugs Are Available At Provis?

- Alimta

- Gemzar
- Herceptin
- Rituxan
- Velcade
- Zometa

The clinic doesn't offer drugs that are funded under the public system.

How Much Does It Cost?

The NDP lashed out at the McGuinty government for allowing this clinic to open under its watch, and according to the party, treatments cost anywhere between \$50,000 and \$70,000.

"Ordinary families should get health care based on need. They shouldn't have to pay out of their pockets, let alone mortgage their homes," Ontario NDP Leader Howard Hampton said in a statement last August.

How Is It Legal?

The company isn't breaking the law because patients can buy medications and have them administered by a service provider.

Provis provides medications that are not funded by the public system and therefore is not contravening the Canada Health Act, said David Spencer, a spokesman for the Ontario Ministry of Health.

The McGuinty government created something called the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act that's basically meant to ensure that Ontarians aren't charged for access to drugs and services that are publicly funded.

"Until they (the drugs) get recommended to us ... these clinics, in the case of Provis, are operating," Spencer explained.

"The Ministry has been in contact with the clinic's administrators to make them fully aware of what the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act says and what their obligations are in that act."