

# news

# release

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BC HEALTH COALITION

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## **Surgeries at private clinics pose unnecessary burden on public health system**

Productions like the Vancouver Extraordinary Makeover Event challenge the validity that patient care, not profit, is the first priority of private surgery clinics says the BC Health Coalition. And ethical concerns about physicians and surgeons who engage in such marketing promotions have caught the attention of the B.C. College of Physicians and Surgeons, causing one VEME sponsor, the False Creek Surgical Centre to withdraw from performing the makeovers because no B.C. doctors would agree to do any cosmetic surgeries.

"Cosmetic surgery is being aggressively marketed but it's an unregulated industry," says BC Health Coalition community co-chair Caryn Duncan. "When cosmetic surgery goes wrong - and since there is no reporting or tracking mechanism, it's extremely difficult to know how often this happens - complications arising from these procedures may end up being treated in the public health care system."

Duncan says that while cosmetic surgery is not normally considered medically necessary, treating complications may be. "Patients with botched cosmetic procedures performed in private facilities end up seeking remedy in the public health care system. That poses an additional drain on already scarce resources and adds to growing wait lists."

Despite claims made by investors in private care, there is no evidence that use of private surgical clinics will shorten wait lists. In Alberta, Ontario and other jurisdictions where private clinics abound, wait lists have actually increased.

The same is true for BC: wait lists in general have grown 22.5% since June 2001. And in the last two years, wait lists for orthopedic surgery have increased nearly 60% despite the expansion of private care in for-profit clinics.

"Government needs to re-invest in our public health care system, not add to the profits of private clinics, especially when high profile marketing schemes suggest that making money is more important the patient care," says Duncan.

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