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Isotope supply worries thyroid cancer survivor

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By **RENATO GANDIA, SUN MEDIA**

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Thyroid cancer survivor Linda Stumm-Davey hopes a back-to-back bout with the deadly disease is the end of her battle.

Given her experience, however, she says one can never be sure the killer cancer is 100% eliminated every time doctors surgically remove the cells.

One thing that comforted her in the past is that Canada, with its Chalk River Nuclear Laboratories, is a major world supplier of isotopes used to fight off cancer cells.

But a reliable supply may become threatened after a series of unscheduled plant shutdowns in 2007, last December and again in February, she says.

"The government needs to invest more money to keep the facility running," says Stumm-Davey.

"Cancer patients need those isotopes to kill those cells, otherwise the disease can spread."

A looming lack of supply is very alarming, says Rita Banach, president of Canadian Thyroid Cancer Support Group.

"There's a huge domino-effect that people are not aware of," she says.

Banach says her group, which is also known as Thry'vors, is calling on the federal government to immediately repair or rebuild the nuclear plant in Ontario so cancer patients' treatments are not jeopardized.

"Once again, thyroid cancer patients are forced to play a dangerous game of Russian roulette with their health, not knowing if the medical isotopes needed for their cancer treatment will be available when their turn comes," she says.

The isotope supply in Europe will be cut off this summer due to a scheduled shutdown, which means the Canadian producer may be pressured to produce more.

Banach says what's tricky for thyroid cancer patients is isotopes can't be stockpiled indefinitely because they have to be delivered to cancer centres in a "just-in-time manner."

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