



Canada's health care system better only than America's: Report

BY GIUSEPPE VALIANTE, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE JUNE 25, 2010



The Commonwealth Fund studied the health-care systems of Canada, the U.S., Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the U.K., and found that only the American system ranks lower than Canada's.

Photograph by: Christopher Furlong, Getty Images

Canadian health care ranks second to last compared with seven industrialized nations, according to a recent report by a private U.S. foundation that monitors and researches international health-care systems.

The Commonwealth Fund studied the health-care systems of Canada, the U.S., Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the U.K., and found that only the American system ranks lower than Canada's.

The report was developed using data from phone and mail surveys conducted with patients and doctors in each country.

Cathy Schoen, senior vice-president at The Commonwealth Fund and co-author of the report, says Canada loses points due to its weak primary care services and its slow adoption of integrated information technology systems for patient records.

She said during the course of the interviews with Canadian patients, many complained of wait times to see a doctor, the lack of after-hours care, and she noted the high use of emergency rooms for non-emergency related medical needs.

Moreover, compared especially with Australia, the Netherlands and New Zealand, Canada has been slow in the spread and use of electronic medical records. These IT systems enable doctors to immediately know all the medications a patient is taking and provide early warnings and alerts on an individual patient's recovery.

Canadian Medical Association President Dr. Anne Doig says she accepts the findings in the report.

"These reports (by The Commonwealth Fund) are held to be reasonably accurate and methodologically sound," she said.

"I accept the report and it agrees with the (reports) I've seen from other independent reporting sources."

Doig said transforming Canada's medical system is the single biggest project the CMA has been working on during the past three years and will continue to work on for at least another three.

She said she agrees that primary care must be improved and the country needs to increase the use of electronic patient records, but much more is required.

Canada needs to be build a culture of patient-centered care, she said. "One could argue the system serves itself rather than the patient."

Moreover, Canada needs to find a way to provide quicker, quality care and bring more accountability and responsibility to the system by developing methods to better track and measure progress.

And while Canadians are second in the category of Long, Healthy, Productive Lives, Doig warned that might soon change.

Doig said most Canadians can get to see a physician if they have an illness and they can get the care they need most of the time. "But arguably, that is deteriorating. And if things don't change, we might find we don't do as well in another 20 years," she warned. "We are essentially enjoying the benefits of reforms that happened in the '60s and '70s."

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