

# U.S. health-care system less efficient: Study

BY SHEENA GOODYEAR ,QMI AGENCY

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While critics of the Canadian health-care system lament long wait times and big costs to governments, a new University of Toronto study shows one way our system works more efficiently, and cheaply, than those south of the border.

Researchers found U.S. physician practices spend almost four times as much money and 10 times as many hours on paperwork than Canadian ones do.

"The Canadian system is by no means perfect and often gets a lot of criticism, but there are points in time where we have to sit back and say our system does allow access for people and does provide quality care and it does deliver it in an efficient fashion compared to the U.S.," Dr. Dante Morra, lead author of the study, told QMI Agency.

American practices spend \$83,000 per doctor every year dealing with health insurers and other payers, whereas Ontario only doles out \$22,000, according to the study published in the journal Health Affairs.

Researchers interviewed doctors from across the U.S. and Ontario about their daily practices. Morra said Ontario's costs are fairly representative of those Canada-wide.

What's more, nurses and medical assistants in the U.S. spend 20.6 hours per week on administrative duties associated with payers and health insurers, whereas in Ontario, that work amounts to just 2.5 hours.

"If you think about it, clinicians, physicians and nurses are best suited to actually provide care to patients," said Morra. "What we found in the U.S. was that actually a significant amount of time spent is spent not dealing with patient care or health issues, but rather just dealing with paperwork associated with multiple different insurance companies."

In Canada, most health costs are covered under provincial medical plans, which means that most of the time, there's just one payer to deal with.

In the U.S., every patient pays differently, either individually or through health insurance, and each health-insurance company has its own policies for billings and submissions. The paperwork associated with payment can pose a huge burden.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Canada spent \$4,363 US per capita on health care in 2009, while the U.S. spent \$7,960. As well, in Canada, 100% of the population has some form of health-care coverage, compared to 85% in the U.S.

Despite the U.S.'s hefty spending, Morra said Canada boasts better patient outcomes.

"Where is all that money going to?" he asked, before answering that a lot of it pays for "administrative waste."

While Morra admitted the U.S. won't be moving to a one-payer system any time soon, he suggested that by working with health insurers to standardize and automate their payment systems, they could save a lot of money, which could be re-invested into health programs.

"Something that often isn't said is that physicians in Canada do spend a lot of time with their patients because they don't have to deal with these administrative problems, and I think that is a benefit of working within the Canadian system."

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