

Canada Health Council Report: Governments; Please Listen and Respond.

Medical Reform Group

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The Canada Health Council's first report, released yesterday, sends a warning to Canadians that unless we accelerate the pace of change in our health care system, we are in deep trouble. The Medical Reform Group, an organization of physicians devoted to maintaining a high quality publicly funded, universal health care system, believes the Council's message is accurate and compelling.

"The report is full of accurate assessments, and excellent advice," said MRG spokesperson Dr. Gordon Guyatt. "Governments made grand statements in the First Ministers' Ten Year Plan in 2004 but, as usual, follow through has been sluggish."

In some areas, Council warnings are dire. Family physicians trained today are less interested in working the long hours of their predecessors. Fewer physicians are interested in entering family practice, and those working in family practice report high levels of burn-out. Unless governments move quickly with health care reform that utilizes integrated teams of care and modern health technology, and reform physician payment structures to make primary care more attractive, our shortage of primary care providers will get worse, not better.

"The Council's message highlights the wisdom of the Ontario government's efforts to kick-start change in primary care through their agreement with Ontario's physicians," said another MRG spokesperson, Dr. Ahmed Bayoumi. "The profession's resistance to change is distressing. The Council report should be a red alert to doctors: wake up and start co-operating with government efforts to reform primary care."

The Council report cites a whole series of other areas where slow progress endangers goals of equitable, efficient care. Implementation of a national home care program that goes beyond immediate post-acute care is necessary if we are to decrease our reliance on more expensive hospital care. We have to train more health care professionals, including nurses, and create secure, healthy environments where they can work. We must ensure we use the money we spend on pharmaceuticals to deliver the best drugs at the lowest prices to every Canadian who needs them.

"Whether the message is training more health providers, reforming primary care, establishing national standards for extended home care, or getting tough with pharmaceutical reimbursement and practice, the Health Council's report is accurate, compelling, and urgent," concluded Dr. Guyatt. "The MRG's message to governments and doctors is: please listen!"