

## **Kirby Report: Three (or more) Steps Forward, One Step Back**

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The Kirby Senate report on health care offers a number of positive directions for Canadian health care, with one major slip, the Medical Reform Group of Ontario said today.

"The report unequivocally endorses the five principles of the Canada Health Act, and rejects private payment of physician and hospital services," said MRG spokesperson Dr. Gordon Guyatt. "Kirby has come down in favor of continued one-tier care for physician and hospital services. The report recommends a major reinvestment in health care by the federal government, including new national home care, pharmacare and palliative care programs. The report says the federal government should take a hands-on approach to directing Canadian health care."

Earlier volumes of the report had led critics to conclude that Kirby, who has a conflict of interest in that he is a board member of a large private-for-profit nursing home chain, would recommend turning away from universally, publicly-insured health care. He has not.

Additional positive recommendations include a move to multidisciplinary, integrated primary health care; direct federal contribution to hospital capital costs; increased funding for medical research; a health care guarantee for timely care; major federal investment in information technology infrastructure; major federal investment in training a greater number of health personnel, including nurses and doctors, to avoid the looming shortages.

"Kirby's conflict of interest, and his personal involvement in for-profit delivery of health care, shows through in only one set of recommendations," said Dr. Guyatt. "The report suggests governments should be neutral about whether the provider of care is for-profit or not-for-profit. The report dismisses evidence that for-profit provision of hospital care increases death rates. To ensure shareholders' return on investment, for-profit providers draw resources from patient care, and the consequences are disastrous." In a directly related blind spot, the report ignores the free-trade agreements' major threat to Canadian autonomy in maintaining the health care system that Canadians need and want.

"All in all, this is a report that Roy Romanow can build on," Dr. Guyatt concluded.