

## **Auditor's Report Wake-up Call for Lax Liberals**

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The Medical Reform Group called today on the federal government to finally address violations of the Canada Health Act.

"The Auditor-General's report is very clear," said MRG spokesperson Dr. Rosana Pellizzari. "She was able to identify 21 reports of violations that remain unresolved. It is likely there are more violations that remain unreported. If the federal government is serious about maintaining the principle of equal access, they have to finally take some action." The Canada Health Act gives the federal government the power to withhold funds from the provinces if they allow direct charges to patients for necessary health services. The federal government has seldom exercised this power.

"The Auditor-General's report notes reported violations in every province," said another MRG spokesperson, Dr. Ahmed Bayoumi. "The most serious violations of which we are aware are occurring in British Columbia and Alberta where patients are paying to jump the queue for MRI scans." In June, 2002, the MRG wrote a letter to federal health minister Anne McLellan, asking for clarification of federal policy. A report in the Toronto Star suggested the federal government had made a deal with the provinces in which they would not define prompt access as necessary care, thus allowing for the MRI queue-jumping. The Minister has not yet responded.

"Continued stone-walling is not acceptable," said Dr. Pellizzari. "Roy Romanow has found that Canadians continue to value equitable access to health care. The federal government presents itself as the champion of Medicare, but continues to violate the public trust. The Liberals hypocrisy is blatant. If the federal Liberals want to reputation as defenders of Canadian public health care, they have to earn it with prompt and decisive action."