

MRG Presentation to Kirby Committee Slams Draft Report

Released – 28 October 2001

In his presentation before the Senate Kirby Committee Medical Reform Group spokesperson Dr. Joel Lexchin criticized the Committee's draft report for abandoning Canadian values of equitable delivery of high quality public health care.

"Kirby's recommendation will pave the way for moving to American-style health care, both less equitable and less efficient," Lexchin said.

The Committee's draft report ignores evidence from Canada that user fees decrease health care access by the poor, without appreciable reductions in overall health care utilization. It ignores American evidence suggesting that for-profit delivery of health care is more expensive, and produces poorer health care outcomes. "In one key study," Dr. Lexchin noted, "patients attending for-profit dialysis centres in the United States had a higher mortality than patients attending non-for-profit centers." Why has Kirby ignored the evidence, and advocated American-style user fees and for-profit health care delivery? Kirby's conflict of interest as a board member of a for-profit health care delivery company, Extendicare, may explain the Committee's irrational and destructive stance.

"What we need is to strengthen, not destroy, equitable public health care," Lexchin said. "The 1997 Canadian Health Forum had it right. We need to extend the principles of the Canada Health Act to delivery of home care and funding for prescription drugs. National home care and pharmacare programs would go a long way toward addressing current problems in Canadian health care delivery."

The Kirby report dismisses increased public expenditures on health care as a solution to under funding. In doing so, it endorses the myth of out-of-control health care spending. In fact, Canada's health care spending has dropped from 10.2% of GDP in 1992 to 9.6% today. "Switching from tax cuts to intelligent health care spending," Lexchin concluded, "could solve problems of emergency room overcrowding, and waiting lists of cancer and elective surgery, over night."