

## **Trade Deals Spell Danger for Canadian Health Care**

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A just-released study for the Romanow Commission tells us that trade agreements may leave Canadian governments helpless to deal with health care problems, the Medical Reform Group said today.

"This latest analysis confirms previous expert reviews," said MRG spokesperson Dr. Gordon Guyatt, one of the study's co-authors. "We've already signed away Canada's independence. The best hope now is to act fast, before NAFTA and the WTO agreements tie our hands completely." The report, prepared under the auspices of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, examines the key trade provisions that affect health care policy. The major finding is that Canadian initiatives, such as a national pharmacare program, could open us to major penalties for taking away American insurance company's business.

"Under NAFTA's chapter 11, companies could charge us with expropriation," Dr. Guyatt explained. "A non-elected body would tell us, as they've done before, that we have to pay huge penalties. Fortunately, the American insurance presence in Canadian drugs is still relatively small. If we act soon, the penalties might not be serious."

Current initiatives to allow for-profit ownership of hospitals could result in the same penalties if we ever wanted our hospitals back as not-for-profit organizations. "We couldn't have created Medicare under these trade agreements," suggested Dr. Guyatt, "and going down the for-profit route may toss away our chances of keeping it."

The recent auditors report has shown how lax the federal government has been in protecting Medicare. The MRG called on the federal Liberals to heed the report's warnings. Aggressive action is needed to create a national pharmacare program, and stop provinces from sending us down a disastrous and irrevocable road by giving away our health care system to for-profit interests.