



Waiting for Hospital Care

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MIKE DUFFY: Well, a year afternoon identifying wait times as the most urgent priority for Canada's health care, the nation's Health Ministers have released a report on wait time bench marks which they say have pretty well solved the problem. But not everyone is buying that argument. Zoltan Nagy is with the Canadian Independent Medical Clinics Association, and he joins us now. Mr. Nagy, what's wrong with the Health Ministers' claims of great success in their fight to reduce wait times?

ZOLTAN NAGY (Canadian Independent Medical Clinics Association): First of all, thank you, Mike, for having me. I believe this is crazy. Why do we feel, why do we believe that adding an extra layer of administration would help the system? We've tried it. We've tried it for not for years but for decades and we can see the results. Wait-lists do not need to be managed, they need to be eliminated. We keep forgetting about the patients. We keep adding more layers of administration. We already have ten different health care systems in this country now. Why do we feel or why do we believe that adding more bureaucracy to it will solve our problems? Mike, we have...

DUFFY: But don't these bench marks statistics, Mr. Nagy, basically suggest that the problem is solved, that there's no need for private clinics in Canada?

NAGY: That has nothing to do, absolutely nothing to do with it. Just take a look at other OECD countries. Forget the American system, they don't have a universal health care system. Look at other European countries. They manage to eliminate wait-lists. They have a universal health care system with a well functioning private system working together. They are not competing with each other, they work with, the two systems work together and this is the model that we they'd to follow. There is a tremendous need for efficiency. Think about it, it was our health care system is still ranked 30th in the world, while we are one of the biggest spenders in the world, so isn't there...

DUFFY: You're saying we're getting the worst of both worlds, high costs and not high efficiency?

NAGY: That's exactly, that's exactly what is happening and the patients' interest is unfortunately lost in this battle, in this intergovernmental, interdepartmental fight.

DUFFY: But there are a lot more people who can't afford to go to a kind of private clinic such as you're operating than those who can. So putting in private clinics, how does that eliminate the problem if the vast majority of people can't afford to pay out of their wallet for health care.

NAGY: That's not, unfortunately that's not true. When you look at the European systems you see that people on the street get the same treatment as anybody else. There's no discrimination. The size of your pocket does not get you faster health services. Look at the countries. Look at France, look at Germany or Switzerland. The poor get the same treatment as the other people in those countries.

DUFFY: I'm sure a lot of people would say, no, no, that's not really true. The poor have to wait and that they get the less competent doctors because the best doctors are all working in the private sector.

NAGY: Doctors can work in both system and it doesn't mean that those in the public system get worse doctors or lesser qualified doctors. This is playing, this is a myth, basically. And it's, what they do is they utilize their resources much better, and ultimately who benefits from this is the patient. That's what we should keep in focus. What helps the patient? When you have two million people on wait-lists with the words of the Supreme Court, people are suffering and dying on wait-lists in Canada, how can we spend our time, our efforts, our energy on studying bench marks and creating bench marks that are not even guarantees? Try and explain this to a patient who has been suffering for months or for years that, oh, well, in the next couple of months we'll have some bench marks which by the way, again, are not guarantees and that will solve the problem. No, it will not solve their problem.

DUFFY: Zoltan Nagy thank you very much for joining us from Vancouver and talking about this very important issue. I appreciate it, sir.

NAGY: It was my pleasure, Mike.