



Senator reiterates that progress must be made soon on reducing wait lists
Canadian Press Newswire
Friday, November 11, 2005
Section: National General News
Byline: BY GREG JOYCE
Source:

VANCOUVER (CP) _ There must be progress on resolving the contentious issue in Canada of lengthy surgical wait lists or the country will end up with a parallel private health care system, Sen. Michael Kirby said Friday.

But Kirby said that scenario need not happen and he is still in favour of a single payer system.

"Mark my words, if significant progress on the wait time issue is not made in the next two to three years we will inevitably end up with a parallel private system," Kirby said at a conference organized by a new group called the Canadian Independent Medical Clinics Association.

The association was founded by Vancouver physician Dr. Brian Day, who is its president and operates a private surgery clinic in Vancouver.

When the association was created last summer, Day said he wanted to put forward an alternative to the "myth" that a single, state-run system was best for Canada.

The conference also devoted some its time to discussing the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision in the Chaoulli-Zeliotis appeal.

The June decision delivered a powerful blow to Canada's single-tier public health care system when it struck down a Quebec law that banned private insurance for medically necessary services.

The case involved Quebec doctor Jacques Chaoulli and his patient George Zeliotis who argued that the ban on buying private insurance for health care infringed on Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as the Quebec charter of rights.

Zeliotis said his year-long wait for hip replacement in 1997 violated his right to life, liberty and security under the Canadian charter, and a similar guarantee in the Quebec charter.

Four of seven Supreme Court justices ruled that the Quebec ban on private insurance for medically necessary services violates Quebec's charter of rights because care in the public system is so slow it endangers life and personal security.

Kirby said the "beauty of the Supreme Court decision is that it is actually forcing governments collectively, and politicians of all parties, to do something they find difficult to do, which is to tackle a contentious issue."

The senator said he and others who share his views are in favour of competition into the delivery sector.

The current system's structure ensures that the only person who suffers from waiting lists is the patient, said Kirby.

“The provincial government doesn't suffer and in fact saves money and regional health authorities don't suffer, so there isn't a huge incentive to improve the system.”

Kirby made it clear he favours a single-payer (public) system because it's “cheaper and more efficient.”

“But me and my colleagues on the (conference) panel are in favour of getting as much competition into the delivery sector as you can.”

He said “left-wing people” are struggling with the Supreme Court decision and how it relates to the Charter of Rights.

The Charter is designed to hold governments accountable, he said.

If governments have the right to provide an essential public service they also must adopt an obligation to provide reasonable health service standards, said Kirby.

“You can't simultaneously as a government set yourself up as a monopoly supplier and simultaneously fail to produce good service.”