

Medical Students Divided at the Prospect of Two-Tiered Health Care in Canada

Future doctors in Canada overwhelmingly support access to health care for all patients, whether they can afford it or not. But some are comfortable with a move toward private clinics for those who can.

“This is probably the most important debate affecting medical students today,” said Philip Brost, president of the Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS). “Changes to the system today will affect our profession for decades to come.”

Opinions about the future of our health care system are varied across the country, according to a report released by the CFMS today. Medical students at Memorial University of Newfoundland are firmly against the development of a parallel private system. They worry that a private system will tap resources from the public system and erode quality. Students at the University of Toronto echo their sentiments, but almost one-third say they would choose to work in a mixed private-public system if given the choice. The majority of students across the country say they want to work in a public, not-for-profit delivery system.

Students are also concerned that private healthcare would reduce the quality of medical education in Canada. They worry that physicians paid by private insurance might teach less since it could compromise their profit margins.

“Medical education should be a priority for policy makers,” argues Brost. “It takes a lot of time and resources to deliver quality training for future healthcare practitioners.”

The CFMS represents 13 medical schools and over 6000 medical students across the country. Since the *Chaoulli v. Quebec* decision, they have been polling their membership about the public-private healthcare debate. The final report detailing opinions across the country was released today along with a recommended set of guiding principles for policy-makers.

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The full CFMS report can be found at www.cfms.org in the newsroom.

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