



# INSIGHTS

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## What is the Balance Point?

### Private vs. public health care

As surely as the day follows the night and winter becomes spring, the landscape of health care in Canada is destined to change. Demand for health care services is soaring, and as our population ages, it can only get worse. New technologies and treatments are driving health care budgets in an upward spiral - with no end in sight. Too often, too many of our citizens wait too long for essential medical procedures. Last year's landmark decision, handed down by the Supreme Court of Canada, kicked the door wide open - in Quebec at least - to private health insurance that would help pay for privately delivered care.

Out of all this, it is fair to conclude that Canada has no choice but to find new ways to meet the challenge of treating and healing its people. But it is also reasonable to conclude that not all propositions for health care reform will or should be accepted. When a trial balloon that violates the core beliefs of our public system is floated, it should be shot down. Alberta Premier Ralph Klein sent up one of these last month and, if he persists with this part of his so-called "Third Way," the newly elected Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, should have no qualms about mercilessly ending its flight.

What Harper needs to take aim at specifically is the proposal for a parallel, private health care system in Alberta. Klein is considering a form of health care that could be funded by patients who dip into their own wallets. Doctors would be expected to work in both the public and private systems. Yet the length of time people wait for service would be determined by the size of their bank accounts. Those with cash would go to the head of the line in the private system and have their ailments dealt with expeditiously. Those of more modest means would wait their turn - and languish, maybe suffer - in the public system.

This is a two-tier system. The concept violates the principles of the Canada Health Act. It goes against everything that Tommy Douglas fought for. The question that you need to be asking yourself is, "Will a two-tiered system work?" Let me come back to that a bit later.

From all I've read, from all I've heard, Canadians have consistently said they cherish our public health care system. Canadians say it is a cornerstone of a nation founded on egalitarian principles. It is equally accessible to all - regardless of people's age or income. It is considered one of the rights of shared citizenship, a tangible confirmation of the belief that a nation is not merely a



collection of individuals but an interconnected community whose members care deeply for and are ready to help one another.

There are many facets of our health care delivery system that are already two-tiered. Access to chiropractors, physiotherapists and other paramedical practitioners are examples of how the system can interconnect, and do it well.

However, when it comes to the big-ticket expenditures it seems to me that a two-tiered system will result in two classes of people, each with different expectations, each receiving different kinds of service. That's wrong. That's not what comes to mind when I think of what being a Canadian is all about.

Quebec's health care reforms accept a new role for the provision of private medical care. These reforms don't offend the Canada Health Act or endanger public health care. Quebec wants to allow the private provision of hip and knee replacements and cataract operations, but only if patients have waited over six months to have the procedures done in a public setting. Public dollars would pay for the private services, though there would be a place for private insurance. Doctors would have to work in either the public or private stream. Essentially, the limited expansion of private care in Quebec would complement and strengthen the province's system - not erode or jeopardize it.

In the recent federal election, Harper championed a Conservative platform committed to a "universal, publicly funded health care system that respects the five principles of the Canada Health Act." The health act and the two-tier proposal being proposed by Alberta are not compatible. Sooner or later Harper has to acknowledge that. Sooner, rather than later, the Prime Minister needs to be seen as standing up for what he believes in. To do otherwise would be remembered by Canadians when they next return to the polls, and as the Liberals recently found out, change is something that Canadians are becoming accustomed to.

Until next time...

## Top 10 Smart Food Eating for a sharper mind

Crossword puzzles alone won't save your brain and protect it from aging, though they will help. So will the right foods. Some edibles are especially good at protecting the brain's delicate nerve cells and blood vessels from the damage that accompanies aging. Most of the foods that are smartest for the brain are also good for the heart because both rely on a steady oxygen supply.

### 1. Blueberries

Sweet wild blueberries are bursting with antioxidants, which mop up nasty free radicals. Chemicals in blueberries have a good affect on blood pressure. Elevated blood pressure can damage delicate blood vessels in the brain and can lead to strokes.

### 2. Dark Leafy Greens

Chemicals called homocysteines are a normal part of protein metabolism, but high levels are linked with cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease (as well as heart disease), which accounts for most cases of dementia. In order to break themselves down, homocysteines require folate and B12 or B6, vitamins found in vegetables like collard greens and swiss chard.

### 3. Salmon, Sardines, and Herring

Fatty fish are full of neuroprotective omega-3 fatty acids. Higher levels of omega-3 in the blood go hand-in-hand with higher levels of serotonin, a mood-enhancing brain chemical. Because a fish diet aids communication between nerve cells, studies have shown its positive effect on learning acquisition and memory performance.

### 4. Spinach

Spinach research has finally caught up with mom's advice: Spinach turns out to be full of antioxidant power. Studies have found that spinach is beneficial in slowing down age-related problems in the central nervous system and cognitive deficits. A salad with spinach has more than three times the amount of folate than one with iceberg lettuce.

### 5. Red Wine, or, better yet, Grape Juice

Drinking red wine in moderation increases longevity. But since alcohol slows down the brain's ability to function properly, grape juice may be a smarter beverage choice. Concord grape juice has the highest total antioxidant level of any fruit, vegetable or juice tested.

### 6. Whole Grains and Brown Rice

One of the best things you can do to improve intake of nutrients is to switch to brown rice. It's filled with vitamins and magnesium, which seems to be important to cognitive health. Whole grains contain vitamin B6, which aids in reducing homocysteine levels.

### 7. Hot Cocoa

Warm up with hot cocoa to help your brain as well as your frostbitten fingers. Chang Young Lee, professor of food chemistry at Cornell University, found that the antioxidant content of two tablespoons of pure cocoa powder is "almost two times stronger than red wine, two to three times stronger than green tea and four to five times stronger than that of black tea."

### 8. Nuts, Notably Almonds and Walnuts

Adding to their party-mix appeal, nuts are rich in antioxidants and have been found to lower blood cholesterol levels. A Harvard study showed that women who ate more than five ounces of nuts per week had a significantly lower risk of coronary heart disease than those who ate an ounce or less. And, they don't contribute to weight gain as much as other kinds of fatty foods.

### 9. Olive Oil

A staple of the highly touted "Mediterranean Diet," olive oil contains the potent antioxidants called polyphenols. Olive oil has been shown to reduce blood pressure and cholesterol levels. The extra-virgin variety is best.

### 10. Garlic

This pungent herb fends off aging via its antioxidant properties. It also contains strong antibacterial and antiviral compounds that help shake off stress-induced colds and infections. Raw, crushed garlic is best; cooked garlic is less powerful but still benefits the cardiovascular system.

## RWAM

### Administration Tip



### Did You Know?

*...that RWAM may apply an administrative fee of up to 15% of the monthly premium if a written request to terminate a group life and health plan is not received in their office prior to 31 days of the cancellation date.*

### Why?

Proper notice ensures that claims that shouldn't be paid aren't, it avoids having RWAM's administration personnel making the day-to-day changes to a case that is moving on, and it eliminates the production of a billing statement.

But are there potential implications to a broker and their client when the cancellation notice is sent at the last minute? There can be.

An information breakdown damages the relationship among the client, broker, and insurer. In addition, the perception of the quality of service and the level of trust between the parties is diminished.

In the business of group insurance, insurers and brokers work closely in the information exchange required to provide group benefits to their clients. We all know that accurate and timely information is important, but let's examine what happens when, due to the hectic, rushed, pace that we have set for ourselves, the information exchanged is inaccurate.

One insurer is relying on the specifications, or request to quote, to assess the risk. They base their decision to provide a quotation on the information that is received, accepting that it is accurate and truly reflects the risk being presented. This carrier then uses the information in the specs and master application to produce booklets, and drug cards. Information is then coded into the claims and administration systems allowing

the insurer to correctly bill the client and pay claims. It's easy to see then how things can go wrong, if in the haste to leave one carrier, one little bit of the information exchange is incorrect. There is a chain reaction of problems for the client that could result in any or all of the following:

- Errors in the contract and booklets resulting in re-issue
- Delay in the client receiving contracts and booklets
- Delay in paying claims because of the time to set the new group up on the system.
- Claims being denied- no two contracts are ever the same
- Errors on the billing statement
- Incorrect pricing, resulting in unexpected rate adjustments, either immediately or at renewal
- Cancellation of the new contract due to a misrepresentation
- Liability for the error/omission falling on the shoulders of the broker/consultant

Proper notice is the courteous thing to do. It ensures that clients get good service, it minimizes E&O suits being lodged, and it avoids RWAM having to charge an administration fee, a fee that could have been avoided had the terms of the agreement between the client and themselves been honoured.