

# Overhauling health-care system tops agenda at annual meeting of Canada's doctors

By Jennifer Graham (CP) – 2 days ago

**SASKATOON — The incoming president of the Canadian Medical Association says this country's health-care system is sick and doctors need to develop a plan to cure it.**

Dr. Anne Doig says patients are getting less than optimal care and she adds that physicians from across the country - who will gather in Saskatoon on Sunday for their annual meeting - recognize that changes must be made.

**"We all agree that the system is imploding,** we all agree that things are more precarious than perhaps Canadians realize," Doig said in an interview with The Canadian Press.

"We know that there must be change," she said. "We're all running flat out, we're all just trying to stay ahead of the immediate day-to-day demands."

The pitch for change at the conference is to start with a presentation from Dr. Robert Ouellet, the current president of the CMA, who has said there's a critical need to make Canada's health-care system patient-centred. He will present details from his fact-finding trip to Europe in January, where he met with health groups in England, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands and France.

His thoughts on the issue are already clear. Ouellet has been saying since his return that "a health-care revolution has passed us by," that it's possible to make wait lists disappear while maintaining universal coverage and "that competition should be welcomed, not feared."

In other words, Ouellet believes there could be a role for private health-care delivery within the public system.

He has also said the Canadian system could be restructured to focus on patients if hospitals and other health-care institutions received funding based on the patients they treat, instead of an annual, lump-sum budget. This "activity-based funding" would be an incentive to provide more efficient care, he has said.

Doig says she doesn't know what a proposed "blueprint" toward patient-centred care might look like when the meeting wraps up Wednesday. She'd like to emerge with clear directions about where the association should focus efforts to direct change over the next few years. She also wants to see short-term, medium-term and long-term goals laid out.

"A short-term achievable goal would be to accelerate the process of getting electronic medical records into physicians' offices," she said. "That's one I think ought to be a priority and ought to be achievable."

A long-term goal would be getting health systems "talking to each other," so information can be quickly shared to help patients.

Doig, who has had a full-time family practice in Saskatoon for 30 years, acknowledges that when physicians have talked about changing the health-care system in the past, they've been accused of wanting an American-style structure. She insists that's not the case.

"It's not about choosing between an American system or a Canadian system," said Doig. "The whole thing is about looking at what other people do."

"That's called looking at the evidence, looking at how care is delivered and how care is paid for all around us (and) then saying 'Well, OK, that's good information. How do we make all of

that work in the Canadian context? What do the Canadian people want?' "

Doig says there are some "very good things" about Canada's health-care system, but she points out that many people have stories about times when things didn't go well for them or their family.

**"(Canadians) have to understand that the system that we have right now - if it keeps on going without change - is not sustainable," said Doig.**

"They have to look at the evidence that's being presented and will be presented at (the meeting) and realize what Canada's doctors are trying to tell you, that you can get better care than what you're getting and we all have to participate in the discussion around how do we do that and of course how do we pay for it."

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