

How Do CARP Members' Experiences Match The Health Council of Canada's Update Report?

August 15 , 2011

CARP members' experiences with the health care system may be more positive than the progress for the country at large on five key health care indicators described in the Health Council of Canada's 2011 progress report "Health Care Renewal in Canada".

Not only have many members had to wait for treatment, many also believe wait times are getting longer. Members are in favour of national drug purchasing and coverage strategies as the best way to bring down the cost of drugs. Use of electronic health records appears to be very common among CARP members' doctors. Teletriage, or telephone medical advisory, is very successful and widely used among CARP members. Health innovation in Canada is very important to CARP members, and they think Canada is a player in this field.

HEALTH COUNCIL OF CANADA REPORT KEY INDICATORS

The Health Council of Canada has issued their regular update report on the state of the 10 year agreement on the Canada Health Accords of 2004. The Health Council report focuses on five key indicators or areas where they have tracked progress. These are wait times, pharmaceuticals management, electronic health records, teletriage and health innovation.

We asked CARP members a battery of questions to elicit their assessments of the health care system on these indicators. In the table below, we show our assessment of how HCC sees progress towards these goals as compared to CARP members' experiences:

	Health Council	CARP
Wait times	Poor	Poor
Pharmaceuticals management	Poor	Poor
Electronic health records	Fair	Excellent
Teletriage	Good	Excellent
Health innovation	Fair	Good

Wait Times

The Health Council of Canada report found that, while wait times for some minor procedures were being met in some provinces and some wait times strategies had been put in place, for the most part, wait times for major surgical procedures had not improved.

Not only have many members had to wait for treatment, many also believe wait times are getting longer.

Fully three quarters of members have had to wait for treatment or tests in the past (75%), the plurality “more than once” (44%). In total, more than a third say they didn’t have to wait “too long” (38%), while a similar proportion say their wait was excessive (“too long” - 37%). One tenth of members in total have had to wait “much too long” (12%).

About one tenth of members have had to repeat a test because the original report was lost or delayed (13%).

Members strongly believe wait times have increased (42%) rather than decreased (13%) for a margin in favour of increase of 29 points.

Pharmaceuticals Management

The Health Council of Canada report found that, despite concrete commitments to the contrary, no progress had been made towards nationwide pharmacare or bulk purchasing.

Members are in favour of national drug purchasing and coverage strategies as the best way to bring down the cost of drugs.

About one tenth of members have skipped a prescription because of cost (14%).

On average, members are taking 3.3 prescription medications, although one quarter are taking five or more (24%).

Members opt for ‘hard’, funded solutions to the cost of drugs, not ‘soft’ solutions like electronic prescribing or new patent laws. The three most popular strategies for reducing drug costs are using national bulk purchase (27%) and making it easier to replace brand name drugs with generics (20%). Equally popular is a national pharmacare coverage plan (18%).

Electronic Health Records

The Health Council of Canada report found that as many as one half of Canadians had electronic medical records.

Use of electronic health records appears to be very common among CARP members' doctors.

More than half our members say their doctor uses electronic health records (58%), and, of those, a third say this record contains all their medical information (35%).

Members are very open about the distribution of their electronic medical record, and the majority say it should be available to anyone they nominate (54%).

There is wide agreement that electronic health records are more common now than they were five years ago (76%), and no one believes they are less common.

Teletriage

The Health Council of Canada report found teletriage is well-integrated and well used in all provinces.

Teletriage, or telephone medical advisory, is very successful and widely used among CARP members.

Close to one half our members know the 24 hour health hot line in their province (45%) and almost a third have used it (31%).

The vast majority of those who called a 24 hour hot line spoke to a nurse (91%) and were satisfied with the outcome (81%).

Health Innovation

The Health Council of Canada report characterizes Canada as a "mid-level" player in this field.

Health innovation in Canada is very important to CARP members, and they think Canada is a player in this field.

Two thirds of members think it is "extremely/very" important that Canada invests in the latest medical technology, regardless of the cost (68%), and a further one quarter think it "important" (26%) for a total importance score of 94%.

Overall, more than half of members think Canada is a leader in medical innovation or is trying to get there (58%), while about one fifth disagree (19%).