

Speaker outlines merits of Medicare

Dr. Michael Rachlis addresses an audience recently in Charlottetown

Defenders of Canada's Medicare system are too busy denying there are problems instead of changing the way health care is delivered, Dr. Michael Rachlis told an audience of 80 people recently in Charlottetown.

The P.E.I. Health Coalition sponsored the meeting. Rachlis is a specialist in community medicine and one of Canada's foremost health policy analysts.

"We built our system upon the principle that no matter who you are or where you live in this country you deserve world-class health care. There's nothing wrong with that value."

But Rachlis said Canadians want to hear there are public sector solutions to Medicare's problems that don't necessarily mean having to pay more money.

"We are delivering services in a pretty inefficient fashion today. The main problem is chronic disease



Dr. Michael Rachlis

in the older population. These problems are not dealt with well in our health system."

Rachlis said Canadians should be able to see a family physician or someone on that family doctor's team within 24 hours of wanting an appointment for anything, not just because they might be seriously ill.

He also believes Canadians should expect to see a



Michael McBane

specialist within a week instead of waiting for months.

"We should expect that of a well-organized health-care system. The system today isn't safe. As good as Canadian family doctors are, they're delivering health care in their offices without all health records and without other professionals. That's not safe."

Rachlis believes wait

times makes the system most vulnerable.

"This is the Achilles heel of Medicare because, opponents say, everybody waits too long.

In certain parts of Canada people are not waiting.

"In P.E.I. there's not much noise that privatizing the system is the solution, but we have to move much faster to change the way we deliver our services focusing more on prevention and the second stage of Medicare."

Michael McBane, co-ordinator of the Canadian Health Coalition, told the Charlottetown audience there is still opposition today from private insurance and others who stand to gain from selling private health care.

"Millions of Canadians are without a drug plan. That's not acceptable. It is important to know that from 1975 to 2006 public health-care spending for

doctors and hospitals has remained stable at four per cent of GDP. It has been stable for over 50 years, and the Department of Finance in Ottawa has predicted that it will remain that way for the next 25 years," said McBane. "We're talking about a system today where the rising costs are private costs — home care costs, dental costs and other out of pocket costs."

Myths are circulating that Medicare is not sustainable, he added.

"There's a myth that it doesn't matter who delivers your health care. Private health care kills more people, is more dangerous, has higher death rates and is much more expensive. We should care who delivers our health care."

CHC wants to make sure the public health care system is guarded and protected and not given away by the people who don't believe in it, said McBane.