

# DR. PROFIT FUDGES THE FACTS

## CMA DELEGATES KEPT FROM DISCUSSING CONTROVERSIAL PRIVATIZATION PAPER AT ANNUAL MEETING

by Guy Caron and Jan Malek

**A**s privatization advocate Dr. Brian Day took over the reins of the Canadian Medical Association at the organization's annual meeting in August, the Council of Canadians was there to stand up for public health care.

This year, the CMA met in Vancouver at the posh Westin Bayshore Hotel, home to the \$25 breakfast buffet. The decor was well suited to the practices of the new CMA president, Dr. Brian Day (a.k.a. Dr. Profit), the owner of several private, for-profit health clinics in British Columbia.

Surprisingly, there was little mention of the CMA's controversial position paper *Medicare plus: toward a sustainable publicly funded health care* at the meeting. Touted by the CMA's leaders as the way to "save" Canada's health care system, the paper called for barriers to private insurance to be removed, for doctors to be permitted to work in both the public and private systems, and for more health care services to be delivered on a for-profit basis.

Unfortunately, doctors at the CMA meeting weren't given the opportunity to discuss or debate the paper.

What they did talk about – briefly, and after the media left the room – was a controversial motion that called for the support of user fees and the creation of health savings accounts. The motion was narrowly defeated by 50 per cent to 48 per cent.

As for Dr. Day's pet project, the "payment-by-results" scheme that would result in hospitals and private clinics competing against each other for



Chapter activists Eve Weimer (left) and Eunice Parker used Dr. Day's own words to reveal his true opinion of public health care.



Activists "rolled out the red carpet" for health care, filled with messages from Canadians telling the CMA that profit is not the cure.

patients, CMA delegates only agreed to "study the proposal further."

### THE WHOLE TRUTH?

If anything, the 2007 CMA Annual General Meeting confirmed what we have believed for a long time – privatization proponents won't hesitate to fudge the facts to reach their goal.

A case in point: In a press conference held on August 16, the Council of Canadians asked the B.C. Department

of Health to investigate possible violations of the B.C. Medicare Protection Act and the Canada Health Act by physicians practising at the Cambie Surgery Centre and the Specialist Referral Clinic – both owned and/or operated by Dr. Day.

We maintain that these clinics seem to employ physicians who are also practising in public hospitals. Allowing doctors to work in both private and public settings will worsen the shortage of health professionals – a shortage that is widely acknowledged, even by Dr. Day himself.

But Dr. Donald Copeman, another outspoken proponent of for-profit care, told the media that the Council was either misinformed or spinning the truth, as "there's plenty of medical staff to accommodate a mixed system."

The same liberty with facts was noticeable in Dr. Day's inaugural speech where, after the obligatory mention that he went to high school with some of the Beatles, he stated that all he wants is "to give Canadians timely access to health care." However, he didn't mention how private clinics make a quick buck by cherry-picking the easiest cases and leaving the more complicated ones for the public system.

Dr. Day also falsely said that the Chaoulli Supreme Court decision rendered the Canada Health Act unconstitutional, and suggested that surgeons were leaving Canada because of a lack of resources. In fact, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, more doctors are now coming to Canada from the U.S. than are leaving Canada.

Dr. Day predictably said that the payment-by-result model is the way to go for

hospital funding (even though CMA delegates refused to go further than adopting a resolution to study the feasibility of the model), and he called for private insurance to “increase access” to health care, without bothering to qualify his comments with any evidence whatsoever.

All in all, it was the same old unsubstantiated rhetoric from Dr. Day.

But we shouldn't be misled into believing that all doctors think this way. A new national group called the Canadian Doctors for Medicare, representing doctors who believe in and support public health care, is gaining strength and increasing its membership. We worked closely with this group during the CMA meeting, and will continue to support their efforts to reach doctors.

## THE FUTURE

The Canadian Medical Association doesn't make the decisions on Canadian health care policy, but the organization certainly is influential. Dr. Day and his designated successor, Dr. Robert Ouellet, are strongly in favour of offering up health care to market forces. The good news is they don't have the power to force it on governments.

We certainly have more to worry about from pro-privatization health ministers like George Abbott in British Columbia, Philippe Couillard in Quebec, and Tony Clement at the federal level. These politicians need to be held accountable to their mandate to ensure that health care is available for all Canadians – not just those who can afford to buy it.

The Council of Canadians will be on the ground next summer at the organization's annual meeting in Montreal, and we will continue to monitor Dr. Day and the CMA in the months ahead.

**For more information about the Council of Canadians' health care campaign, give us a call at 1-800-387-7177 or visit [www.profitisnotthecure.ca](http://www.profitisnotthecure.ca).**

## HEALTH CARE ADVOCATES HIT THE STREETS

“PUBLIC HEALTH CARE WORKS!” “PROFIT IS NOT THE CURE!”

**P**ublic health care supporters recently delivered this message loudly and proudly outside Dr. Brian Day's private Cambie Surgery Centre in Vancouver. We sported brightly coloured signs with some of Dr. Day's most outrageous statements against public health care. Statements like “I do not support the principles of the Canada Health Act” and “If the best thing is to pay, jump the queue and break the law – it's not my role to uphold it” show exactly how Dr. Day feels about Canada's public health care system.

Protesting outside of Dr. Day's Cambie Surgery Centre and the Specialist Referral Clinic, where he is Medical Director, were just some of the ways the Council of Canadians was able to show and strengthen support for public health care while the CMA was meeting in Vancouver.

We also joined forces with the B.C. Health Coalition, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, the B.C. Hospital Employees' Union and other supportive groups for a large public event in front of the Vancouver Art Gallery. Having filled the courtyard with bright red balloons, health care supporters offered information to people passing by.

We heard many different stories and views that day, but one thing was consistent: people want a publicly funded and publicly delivered health care system and do not support the dismantling of medicare.

We spoke with people from other countries who were appalled to hear that the Canadian government was not doing everything in its power to protect the public system. One man from Australia (where private health care was introduced as a supposed way to reduce wait times) said private health care there has created a class-like system: health care for those who can afford it and longer waiting for those who can't.

Debra McPherson, President of the B.C. Nurses' Union, relayed one poignant story about a woman who needed to see a specialist for surgery. She was referred to a doctor in a public hospital, but was told that she would have to wait months before she could be seen. She was then asked if she would be willing to go to a private clinic for the procedure. The woman agreed, only to find out that she was making an appointment with the same doctor.

The question of opening up our health care system to privatization is really about money. As Dr. Day points out on a U.S. website: “The coming changes [to the health care system] will create a massive new industry and enable the Canadian health industry and its workers to enter the international health market and participate in the \$2 trillion American health economy.”

The Council of Canadians will continue to stand on guard for public health care when organizations like the CMA, or privatization proponents like Dr. Day, try to tell people that profit is more important than people's health.

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