

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 2 PM EST, DECEMBER 13 2010

Opening Statement
Dr. Jeff Turnbull
National Online Dialogue Launch
healthcaretransformation.ca

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for joining us today.

In recent years, Canada's doctors have grown increasingly concerned about the state of our country's health care system.

Canada's physicians have witnessed firsthand overcrowded emergency rooms, too many cancelled surgeries, and too many patients in hospital when they could be getting the care they need elsewhere – if it were available.

Often we have seen vulnerable citizens – First Nations, the homeless – not get the appropriate health care they deserve.

Doctors in every part of the country face similar challenges, but it's patients who suffer the most.

Physicians believe that Canadians deserve better.

We have heard from many experts on the subject of health care... Canada's doctors believe that these expert reports alone cannot fix our problems.

Decision-makers need to hear from the public to know what they expect from the system.

As a result, the Canadian Medical Association is launching a National Dialogue on Health Care – a dialogue that will take place online starting today and at a series of forums across the country, beginning in the new year.

This is a national call to action urging Canadians to get involved.

This dialogue builds on the policy blueprint we released last August: *Health Care Transformation – Change that Works. Care that Lasts.*, which itself was based on a broad consultation of physicians and other health care workers.

Also serving as common ground for the dialogue is the *Charter for Patient-Centred Care*, which the CMA developed in conjunction with patient organizations from across the country.

As physicians, we have some ideas about how the system could be made better. But Canadians do, as well, and we want to hear from them.

The CMA's *Health Care Transformation* policy calls for a health care system that focuses on patients based on a quality and safety agenda, that integrates best practices and makes better use of available technologies, and that would function under a modernized *Canada Health Act*.

But we also believe that change is best driven from the ground up, and that Canadians, above all, ought to have a say in the future of their system.

In every discussion of the health care system, the issue of resourcing arises.

But sustainability isn't just about money. It's about what that money gets us. It's about providing universal access to high quality health care, delivered in a cost-effective manner, with an emphasis on evidence and outcomes.

What we want to do is: to figure out first what Canadians want the system to look like.

Then we need to look at the many ways we can make the system more efficient and effective with the resources we already have.

Then it will be time to talk about how we're going to pay for it.

As the National Dialogue moves forward, we will be naming a blue ribbon panel to look at resourcing options, and the public consultations will inform its work.

We will combine what we hear both from the public and the experts into one final action plan that should be ready by next fall.

So what are we asking people? To begin with, we're framing the debate around the following three questions:

First: The law underpinning our system – the Canada Health Act – dates back to the 1980s. It covers only doctor and hospital care. Do you think it should be broadened to include things like pharmacare and long-term care?

Second: It's important for citizens to feel they are receiving good value for their health care. What would you consider good value?

And third: Patients and their families play an important part in their health care. What do you think Canadians' responsibilities are, now and in the future, regarding their health?

How people respond to these questions will help determine the future of our health care system.

To learn more and to register their views, we invite Canadians to go to our website, healthcaretransformation.ca. There will also be other opportunities for Canadians to speak out.

This is the only way we will achieve meaningful and lasting change in our health care system.

As the saying goes, we can either shape our future, or let the future shape us.

Canada's physicians urge Canadians to take this opportunity to let their voices be heard.

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