



*National Post*

Letter to the Editor

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Re: “The great health care squeeze,” April 18, 2011, National Post

The Canadian Nurses Association was very disappointed to hear the Fraser Institute repeat the usual rhetoric that our health system is unsustainable – unless, of course, we swallow the magic pill of privatization.

The Canadian Health Coalition reveals that “from 1975 to 2009, medicare spending ... has remained remarkably stable at between 4% and 5% of our gross domestic product.” The biggest health cost escalator is, in fact, prescription drugs – which are largely paid for in the private realm.

While Canada’s registered nurses are very much in favour of health system reform, we vehemently disagree with the recommendation that policy-makers accelerate changes to health care “by suspending the Canada Health Act on a trial basis, to allow provinces to test market-friendly experiments, such as abuse-discouraging user-fees and private health insurance.”

Let’s do the exact opposite and *use* the Canada Health Act as the framework to implement system-level improvements nationally. The right changes can leverage health-care value creation much more effectively than piecemeal provincial and local approaches alone. One example: a national system of electronic health records for every citizen. Canada, a world leader in information technology, is still using an archaic mix of paper-based patient records and a plethora of individual electronic information systems that are not compatible with one another. Imagine the efficiency gains possible if you could go from family doctor, to specialist, to hospital and give each care provider access to your complete medical history.

This is just one example of the benefits that national leadership can bring to health care. More importantly, it doesn’t require us to take the huge risk of “temporarily” suspending the Canada Health Act – and letting the genie of privatization out of the bottle.

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