

Pay out of pocket and wait no more for care

Written by John Carpay

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By John Carpay, For The Calgary Herald

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Alberta health bureaucrats are paid as much as \$812,000 per year while many of their fellow citizens endure discomfort and pain as they wait for surgery.

Some Albertans risk death while cancer spreads in their bodies for months and months before they receive the necessary diagnostic tests and treatment. Salary-plus-bonus figures ranging from \$726,000 to \$812,000 per year, paid to senior bureaucrats, are an outrage to Albertans who must suffer in pain on waiting lists, and who are prevented from working to earn a living.

But what is even more outrageous is that these bureaucrats are probably achieving the best results possible under Alberta's current health-care laws. It's the government monopoly over essential health services -- and the absence of real accountability through competition -- that inflicts suffering and death on Albertans. The bureaucrats who run this monopoly are not the problem. Even the world's best swimmer can't swim from Vancouver to Hong Kong; even the brightest bureaucrats cannot efficiently spend \$15 billion tax dollars per year on health-care services for Albertans.

Albertans do not suffer on waiting lists when it comes to food, clothing and shelter -- three things that can be just as important as health care, and sometimes more so. Why are there no shortages and waiting lists for houses, steaks and shirts? Because Albertans are (for the most part) free to build (and sell) houses and condo towers, free to grow (and sell) corn and potatoes, and free to make (and sell) coats and underwear.

You don't see people starving to death while waiting for "free" taxpayerfunded food. And people generally don't freeze to death for want of "free" clothing and housing from the government. There are no serious waiting lists for dental care, vision care and chiropractic because it's legal for Albertans to actually pay money -- gasp! -- for these health services.

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If the Alberta government took control over food production and distribution in the same way that the government now controls health care, the government would declare that food is "free" for Albertans, and that food must be paid for only by tax dollars.

We would then see shortages of many kinds of food. There would be long waiting lists for these "free" products which have been taken off the market and placed into a taxpayerfunded, union-controlled, government-run monopoly.

Rather than being outraged over the \$812,000 paid to health bureaucrat Chris Eagle, Albertans should be outraged at the Alberta government's clear commitment to continue its monopoly over essential health services, by making it illegal for Albertans to spend their own after-tax dollars on their own health.

The government's intention is demonstrated by its Internet survey about the new Alberta Health Act, which says nothing about giving Albertans real choice and real accountability.

This Internet survey lays out some obvious ideals that nobody would seriously disagree with, like "putting people and their families at the centre of their health care," "being committed to quality and safety" and "fostering a culture of trust and respect."

And who could argue against patients having "the right to raise concerns and receive a timely response to their concerns" and "the right to be fully informed about treatment and services"? I would expect more than 95 per cent of people who complete this Internet survey to agree with these goals.

But the government's Internet survey doesn't ask whether you agree with the government having a monopoly on essential healthcare services.

It doesn't ask whether you should have the right to spend your own after-tax dollars on the health-care services and insurance of your choice. It doesn't ask whether it's fair that you can buy private health insurance for your pet but not for your child.

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Rather than insisting on its government monopoly, Alberta should learn from France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and other countries which make health care available to all citizens regardless of income, but avoid waiting lists by allowing healthcare consumers the freedom to buy supplementary health services and insurance if they choose.

It's clear that the new Alberta Health Act will simply perpetuate the government's cruel monopoly. That -- and not the fat salaries paid to top bureaucrats -- should be cause for outrage.

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