Health Reform Overview Excellent Romanow Primer

November 21, 2002 – New from CPRN: a primer for those who wish to stay on top of the debate over the future of health care.

The release of the report of the Romanow Commission next week will top off a series of recent reports from federal and provincial governments, each focussing on reform of Canada's health care system.

"The uninitiated bystander could be forgiven for feeling inundated by a sea of proposals," says Cathy Fooks, Director of CPRN's Health Network.

"We thought it might be helpful to summarize their main points of agreement and disagreement, and to help situate Mr. Romanow's findings."

Fooks and Steven Lewis, President of Access Consulting and a professor at the University of Calgary's Centre for Health and Policy Studies have done just that. Their paper, ***Romanow and Beyond: A Primer on Health Reform Issues in Canada***, pulls together the major recommendations of commissions and advisory committees in Alberta, New Brunswick, Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan, as well as the federal National Forum on Health, the Senate's Kirby Committee, and the Interim Report of the Romanow Commission.

The authors don't pretend to cover all recommendations. Instead, they concentrate on areas the above groups have all identified as priorities for health reform. These are:

- A focus on population health;
- Financing the health care system;
- Primary care reform;
- Regionalization of service delivery;
- Pharmaceutical policy;
- Health human resource planning;
- Quality improvements and infrastructure supports;
- Governance and accountability mechanisms;
- Home care services.

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Fooks and Lewis review the recommendations of each initiative and identify areas of agreement and points at issue.

“There is considerable consensus in terms of what’s wrong with existing arrangements,” says Fooks. “There are also areas of consensus regarding solutions.”

The authors identify six areas of agreement in particular: the need for reinvestment; primary care reform as a precursor to other reforms; regional organization of services; a focus on quality of care; the need for health human resource planning; and stronger governance mechanisms.

“The real challenge ahead is to develop a national vision that ties these together and builds a basis for addressing points of contention and moving ahead in a concerted way.”

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