Reforming Primary Care: What's the Hold-up?

Friday, July 23, 2004 – In plans to make Canada's health care system more efficient and more effective great hopes have been pinned on reorganizing primary care – where most of us enter the system. So many of the efficiencies to be gained, so many of the stresses to be overcome, can be addressed at this level. That's why efforts to reform health care delivery around the world, including in Canada, have made primary care reform a priority. Yet the results have been mixed.

Implementing Primary Care Reform in Canada: Barriers and Facilitators, by Cathy Fooks, outgoing Director of CPRN's Health Network, is her contribution to a new book from McGill-Queen's University Press that compares experience with primary care reform in Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. *Implementing Primary Care Reform: Barriers and Facilitators* is edited by Sam Shortt, Ruth Wilson and John Dorland and published by McGill-Queen's University Press.

Fooks asks why, despite solid evidence that services can be organized more effectively and achieve better outcomes for citizens, reform in the organization of primary care services is so slow in coming?

In search of an answer, she reviews the current provincial actions to reform primary health care services. Although provinces often use different terminology to describe primary care and its scope, there are a number of common elements in their reform plans: a team approach to service delivery, rostering of patients, 24/7 access, mixed funding formulas for services and programs, and increased emphasis on health promotion and prevention. Fooks describes these as comprising a loose "Canadian model".

She explores the barriers and facilitators in implementing that model in terms of three variables – the legacy of Canadian health policy culture, the structure and design of Canadian health care, and the supports required for policy implementation.

Fooks finds the slow pace of change is a result of the disjointed nature of Canada's health care "system" and the sometimes less than complete commitment to change of those involved, from politicians to practitioners. However, she sees supporting factors strengthening and concludes that reforms will go ahead, though patience may be required.

You can access or download a copy of her paper by clicking here.

For information on how to order the book, *Implementing Primary Care Reform*, by Short et al., click here.

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