

## **Taming of the Queue III: Where the Rubber Hits the Road with Wait Times**

**Ottawa** – When Stephen Harper guaranteed Canadians they’d be able to get essential medical services within clinically acceptable wait times, he significantly turned up the volume on this national discourse.

The Conservative Leader’s election promise followed the Supreme Court’s Chaoulli decision which condemned Quebec for long delays in testing and surgery; the promises by First Ministers in September 2004 to create a National Wait Time Strategy; and the resulting benchmarks announced last December that would establish common goals for the provision of medical treatments and screening services.

But the more wait times are studied, and the more success is achieved in some areas, the more complex the solution appears to be to getting timely medical services to all Canadians.

A third symposium on wait times took place recently in Ottawa: *The Taming of the Queue III – Wait Time Measurement, Monitoring and Management: Where the Rubber Meets the Road*. Participants heard a mixed review of the benchmarks: that significant progress is being made, but also that cutting wait times in targeted areas has trade-offs. Here are some examples: the Alberta Bone & Joint Health Institute has cut its waiting list for hip/knee surgery from 82 weeks to 11, by instituting an integrated approach based on a continuum of care. On the other hand, the participants also heard that benchmarks to cut wait time in priority areas could mean increased wait times in other areas; that the current priorities favour baby boomers and might neglect the needs of children and Aboriginal People. The symposium also heard that the Prime Minister’s promise to guarantee wait times could mean a legal battle if benchmarks aren’t met in time.

The event was organized by the Canadian Medical Association, the Association of Canadian Academic Healthcare Organizations, the Canadian Healthcare Association, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research the Canadian Nurses Association, Bell Canada, Health Canada and the Health Council of Canada.

150 people attended the meeting – including government representatives, health policy analysts and health professionals – to measure the progress being made across the country, and to identify the challenges ahead.

***The Taming of the Queue III – Wait Time Measurement, Monitoring and Management: Where the Rubber Meets the Road*** by Tom McIntosh, Director and Renée Torgerson, Researcher with CPRN's Health Network, is the report on the conference. It provides a complete summary of the speakers' presentations, and a broad assessment of the progress across the country in wait time measurement and management.

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