

BULLETIN

Shortage of health professionals threatens access to critical health services

January 14, 2005

Without an adequate supply of skilled health professionals to operate medical equipment, Canadians access to critical medical imaging technologies will continue to be hampered, says Cindy Stewart, Co-Chair of the Canadian Health Professionals Secretariat (CHPS) and President of the Health Sciences Association of BC (HSABC/NUPGE).

Stewart's comments follow the release of a report today by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) entitled *Medical Imaging in Canada 2004*. The report concludes that while the last decade saw an increase of more than 75 per cent in the supply of MRIs and CT scans, there has been no increase in the supply of professionals required to run the equipment.

Compounding the problem is the fact that the population of medical radiation technologists (MRTs) is aging. Between 1991 and 2001, the proportion of MRTs under the age of 35 has gone from 47% to 31%.

-There is some concern that there will not be enough professionals to properly run the increased number of machines," the report concludes.

-Improving the availability of new technologies and medical imaging equipment is important, but this equipment becomes little more than a large and very expensive testament to poor management if it is allowed to stand idle because there are not enough qualified technologists to run it," said Stewart.

-It makes no sense to spend more scarce health care dollars on capital equipment when we do not have a strategy in place to ensure the skilled professionals required to operate the equipment are available now, and in the future."

In a November 2002 Ipsos-Reid poll, Canadians said that reducing wait times for diagnostic services, such as MRI and CT scans, should be the number one priority for new health care spending.

-But a serious shortage of health professionals is leaving patients without access to those critical services, jeopardizing quality care, and in fact exacerbating the waitlist problem government says its committed to fixing," said Stewart.

The CIHI report chronicles the problem in the specific fields related to medical imaging, but the shortage of health professionals is much wider. Health professionals are intimately involved in every step of health care delivery including diagnosis, treatment and recovery, and staff shortages are reported across the spectrum.

-Canadians expect a team of highly skilled health professionals delivering timely and quality services, but those expectations will never be met unless governments address the shortages of health professionals" said Stewart.

"Governments must recognize that they can only make significant progress in reducing wait times and improving access by working with and supporting the dedicated health professionals currently working in the

system and by investing in the recruitment of future health professionals."

CHPS represents more than 60,000 health professionals across the country. These are the physiotherapists, respiratory therapists, pharmacists, dietitians, lab and x-ray technologists, as well as more than 100 other highly specialized disciplines integral to the delivery of health care services.

-30-

Contact: Miriam Sobrino
Communications Officer
604 439 0994 office / 604 328 2886 cell

Type:

[Media Release](#)

- [Print](#)
- [PDF](#)

180 East Columbia
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website
www.hsabc.org

Telephone 604-517-0994
1-800-663-2017