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Health care system needs emergency surgery

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A Prairie-based think tank is rightly promoting the idea that Canadians have to approach the health care system more as consumers, and demand excellent service.

The Winnipeg-based Frontier Centre for Public Policy has done studies that should interest patients. In the first, it compared the health care system in Canada to 29 European countries, and found this country ranked 23rd.

This was in a consumer-oriented approach to health care, and it found that although the Canadian health care system offers excellent clinical outcomes, it is inefficient and slow to provide care. The Canadian system is particularly high spending, but provides little bang for the buck.

Canada was only able to finish ahead of emerging economies such as Bulgaria, Hungary and Latvia; while scoring lower than smaller economies such as the Czech Republic, Estonia and Greece.

The report found Canadian patients can be subjected to four long waits: The first wait is to see their family doctor or a GP. The second wait is to see a specialist. The third is for diagnostic procedures, and the fourth is for treatment. The report says it is not unusual for these waits to add up to more than a year.

There was some good news from the Frontier Centre. When it compared the provinces, B.C. ranked second in the nation, behind only Ontario. This is an average province in terms of wait times and the range of services provided, but ties for first for clinical outcomes.


However, the think tank says that compared to European nations, the Canadian health care system lacks a culture of accountability and transparency, and puts providers and bureaucrats ahead of consumers.

We would like to be able to say that recent health care reforms in B.C. promise to change that, but certainly no member of the media would laud the new Fraser Health Authority for being either transparent or accountable.

Our health care system is a patient requiring major surgery.

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