

BULLETIN

## Canada's public health care: fight for it or lose it, US doctor warns

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**f you dont fight to keep** publicly-funded health care in Canada, youll lose it forever, Dr. Linda Peeno warns.

A physician from Louisville, Kentucky, Dr. Peeno is an outspoken critic of health management organizations (HMOs) ... the powerful private health insurers that she says are killing patients by denying them funding for surgery and other life-saving medical treatment. She told a Vancouver audience this fall that just as there is a culture of market-driven health care in the United States, there is a public health care culture in Canada.

Dr. Peenos life as a medical reviewer for HMOs and her conversion to an outspoken critic is dramatized in a recent made-for-TV movie starring Laura Dern. She uses clips from the film, called *Damaged Care*, as part of her presentation.

Dr. Peeno was one of the speakers in a series called, "-Keep Health Care Public," organized by the BC unions with the BC Health Coalition and other progressive health advocacy groups. She said millions of people in the United States cannot afford the hefty premiums HMOs charge for health insurance, let alone the costly medical services.

-You think you have a problem in Canada waiting in line for an MRI. Well, in the United States, 41 million people dont even get the opportunity to be put on a waiting list."

As a medical reviewer for HMOs, Dr. Peeno said she was continually pressured to deny benefits to claimants to enhance the insurance companies bottom line.

She worked for the profit-making Humana corporation until she could no longer tolerate its practices and moved to a non-profit insurer owned by several Kentucky hospitals. But as that firm began losing money, it too denied more and more benefit claims. Dr. Peeno now teaches medical ethics at a Kentucky university.

The powerful HMOs keep a tight grip on information, and negative stories about them seldom surface in the American media. During the last decade of strong growth, HMO premiums have risen an average 18 per cent per year, costly surcharges have been added to hospital care, and more patients are being denied benefits, she said.

-It amounts to a monumental scam on the American public at the expense of our health."

Dr. Peeno recently made a presentation to the [Romanow Commission on the Future of Canadas Health Care](#), urging Canada not to abandon its publicly-funded system. 

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