

Defeating the zombie: just give us the facts

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by CINDY STEWART



recent article in the *Globe and Mail* (April 7, 2004) is one of the most articulate and succinct defences of our public medicare system I have seen in the mainstream media.

Gordon Guyatt, a professor in health sciences at McMaster University in Ontario, takes up a few column inches to spell out, in plain language, why public health care makes sense □ and why five different enquiries into public health care in Canada have agreed.

□The Hall commission that led to publicly funded physician and hospital services first considered the relative merits of public versus private health care funding. Justice Emmett Hall conducted a second review, the results of which led to the Canada Health Act of 1984. In 1997, the National Health Forum toured the country, getting input from leading experts. Both Michael Kirby's Senate Committee and the Romanow commission made their recommendations at the end of 2002.

□The five reviews all came to the same conclusion: Public funding of health care is more equitable and more efficient. A parallel private system will not only introduce inequities in access to care, but will waste our resources and reduce our international competitiveness.□

It doesn't get much clearer than that. The column takes years of commissions and reviews and reminds Canadians that we don't need to continue this debate. The debate has been had over and over again. The conclusions are always the same. So why does the pro-private argument always find the media? Why are we continually bombarded with rhetoric about the high cost of health care, and the inability to sustain a publicly funded health care system?

Clearly, it's not because it makes economic sense. Guyatt spells out the facts in his column:

The United States spends 32 per cent of its health care dollars on administrative costs while Canada spends 16.7 per cent of its health care money on administration. Between 1992 and 1998, the share of our gross domestic product dedicated to health care dropped from 10 to 9 per cent, while health care is responsible for chewing up 14.9 per cent of the US GDP.

No. It's not economics that drives this debate. It's ideology, as Guyatt explains:

□If our commitment to maintain or extend tax cuts is absolute, we indeed have a problem. In that ideology, it doesn't matter if we spend more on health care and receive less. We have no choice but to turn to private pay, two-tier health care.

□Canadian health economist Bob Evans has described private-pay advocacy for health care as a zombie:

intellectually dead, but destined to keep rising again and again to haunt health policy debates.

But views such as these raised by Dr. Guyatt in a guest column in the Globe and Mail are not very often seen in the mainstream media. To stay informed, we have to seek out information sources we can count on to present a defensible counter to the relentless drone of the private for-profit lobbyists.

Dr. Guyatt has been a regular columnist in [Straight Goods](#), a web-based magazine that bills itself as [Canada's independent on-line source of news, analysis, information, and fun.](#)

As the debate about public versus private health care continues to rage, the arguments we need to support our vision for quality and accessible health care for everyone who needs it are out there. But you won't find them on a regular basis on the evening news or in the corporate media, so take the time to check out the alternatives — including straightgoods.com and the thetyee.ca, a BC-based web magazine that delivers interesting news you don't see anywhere else, as well as a critical analysis of mainstream media. 

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