

Sweetheart deal for MDs raises questions of equity

Should Albertans be concerned about the "secret sweetheart deal" accorded by Alberta politicians to doctors?

Why have doctors been offered a \$17 million incentive if they are successful in reducing health care costs by \$50 million?

Initially doctors were being asked to bear a significant proportion of the reductions in a direct and personal manner. Why has the situation altered so suddenly and dramatically? Have the power, money and prestige of the medical profession constituted factors in the about-face by the government?

Several concerns arise in the proposed reprieve: First, when it is the medical profession that is entrusted with the moral fiduciary duty to safeguard the health care of poor and disenfranchised Albertans, does not the monetary reward for cutting costs place doctors in a direct conflict of interest position?

In every decision and deliberation, a doctor will be intimately challenged by the choice between "doing the right thing" regardless of costs, and the need to reduce costs in favor of personal financial benefit.

Second, when the premier ran for election he campaigned on a platform of "open government." Where

is the consultation and transparency in this agreement?

Third, do the wealthy and powerful not have an obligation to bear their proportionate share of government cuts? Why should the medical profession profit at the expense of others in the system?

Fourth, when the premier ran for election he also stated that he wished to "listen to Albertans." While he may listen to all, he "blinks" only for some.

What happens now? Will the premier respond to the anger and mistrust of ordinary Albertans by retracting the agreement? Will the rank and file of the AMA back the agreement or act in a morally responsible manner in accordance with their Hippocratic oath?

Will the Liberal opposition have the courage to question doctors who may constitute an equally powerful lobby in their own party? Will Albertans demand and obtain transparency and input into the appropriate health care "solution" in ensuring quality of care?

Mahatma Gandhi espoused that the level of civilization of a society can only be measured by the manner in which it treats its weakest members.

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