

June/July 2000

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What's New?

This column highlights key WCWL events since the April/May issue of the UPDATE.

- WCWL presentations were made at two conferences: the Edmonton Statistics Conference (June 12) and National Healthcare Leadership Conference in Ottawa (June 19).
- A progress report was made to staff at the Canadian Medical Association and the Health Transition Fund.
- Following teleconferences and in-person panel meetings in late June, all five panels have developed beta versions of prioritization tools.
- A meeting of the WCWL Partnership was held in Calgary on July 25 & 26. Reports on prioritization tool development were received and plans for additional research were discussed.
- CMAJ has accepted for publication the article "Setting priorities on waiting lists: defining our terms"; look for it in the October 3, 2000 issue.

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Upcoming Events

- September 7 — WCWL Steering Committee meeting
- November 22 — Third International Conference on Priorities in Health Care, Amsterdam
- Priorities in Health Care

Good News from the Panels

A couple of months ago in this space, Steven Lewis expressed cautious optimism about expectations of what this project will accomplish within the time allotted. Now that the five clinical panels have developed beta versions of the tools, what can we conclude?

In nine months, the five clinical panels have done a superb job of combining clinical common sense with empirical evidence in developing tools that are "almost" ready for implementation.

It will take work in three areas before the tools can be considered ready for rank-ordering patients for care: tool refinement, environment preparation, and public acceptability.

1. More work on the tools themselves — in some cases more pilot testing will be required to fine tune the items and weighting factors in the linear models. In other cases, alternative, analytic approaches will be used to examine and generate priority scores. For all five tools, additional work will be done to improve reliability.
2. Begin work in the environment — while the instrument refinement is under way, we will begin to survey the regional health authorities, the environments in which the prioritization will take place. This work will be guided by our new oversight panel, which will consist of senior medical administrators from the seven regional health authority partners and the five co-chairs of the clinical panels.
3. Assess acceptability — another challenging aspect is the uncertainty of the extent to which this prioritization process is acceptable to the general public and to patients and their families. While it is clearly beyond the scope of this project to provide a definitive answer, WCWL will make, at minimum, initial steps toward an answer.

Partners' Meeting in Calgary

A group of fifty Partners, panel members, and guests gathered in Calgary on July 25 & 26 to receive reports from the five clinical panels and to discuss a research plan for the next six months. The event began on Tuesday afternoon with a meeting of the Steering Committee, and was followed by a reception and dinner.

We were very fortunate that Dr. David Naylor was able to attend and offer his perspective on our work-in-progress and on the general topic of queuing for health care. Having been a key participant in the development of the Ontario Cardiac Care Network and having written extensively on this area, his comments were informative and thought-provoking.

Over the two days of discussion and debate, a number of issues were raised. Because of the problems inherent in visual analogue scale-based measures of relative priority, consideration should be given to including a measure of maximum waiting time. While the WCWL methodology did not question the appropriateness of patients on waiting lists, in the course of discussion it became clear that this may be revisited. It was remarked that these tools provide the means to identify a threshold score below which the procedure may not be provided (explicit rationing). Furthermore, they could be used to identify problem areas of resource allocation. In addition to guidance from the health care providers, it was suggested that input from the general public, patients and their families be considered. While the linear model approach to priority setting has value, there is merit in assessing the data with non-linear models or algorithmic methods.

In addition to general comments on methodology, each of the panels identified a number of "next steps" which would be followed in an attempt to develop clinically valid, useful, and reliable wait list management tools.

The WCWL Partners are expected to meet again prior to the submission of the final report to Health Canada's Health Transition Fund Secretariat.

New Faces at WCWL

Representation on the WCWL Partners' group has remained essentially unchanged since its inception in late 1998. So it is with a sense of regret that I thank Ms. Pat McKendrick for her participation as she takes on new responsibilities with the Capital Health Authority and

ends her association with this Project. Pat played a key role in organizing the Hip and Knee Replacement Panel and was effective in communicating our work to her colleagues.

Taking over from Pat is Ms. Angela Estey, a Regional Project Planner with Capital Health. We look forward to involving Angela in tests of the Hip and Knee Replacement and MRI prioritization tools.

There have also been some changes within the research team. With the completion of the literature searches, sincere thanks go to Ms. Annmarie Banchy and Ms. Cheryl Martin for their work on the project. The reviews they helped develop can be found on the WCWL website (Library).

Joining the team for the next six months to prepare WCWL White Papers on standardizing the definition of waiting time and on methods for establishing standard acceptable waiting times is Ms. Claudia Sanmartin. Claudia has a M.Sc. in Health Administration from the University of Toronto and is a doctoral candidate in health services research at the University of British Columbia. Claudia co-authored the report *Waiting Lists and Waiting Times for Health Care in Canada—More Management?? More Money??* — the report which in large part gave rise to the WCWL Project.

WCWL Website Refurbished

On July 26, a significantly revised website was posted (www.wcwl.org). The most recent versions of the priority tools can be found there, as well as literature reviews. For a concise summary of changes, click on "What's New." We are experimenting with a new search engine and would appreciate your opinion of it.

UPDATE

WESTERN CANADA WAITING LIST PROJECT

THE UPDATE is the monthly newsletter of the Western Canada Waiting List Project. It is published at the Department of Public Health Sciences, 13-103 Clinical Sciences Building, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2G3. For more information, please contact John McGurran, Project Director, at 780-492-2647 or john.mcgurran@ualberta.ca visit our website at <http://www.wcwl.org>

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