

August/September 1999

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Director's Note

Summer has come and gone quickly here in Edmonton, and it has been a summer of significant progress for the Western Canada Waiting List Project. Here is a brief update.

- The summer began with a meeting of WCWL Partners, our clinical panel co-chairs and members. More than 50 attended the June 25-26 meeting in Calgary. A report on the meeting will be distributed to all participants and to any others upon request.
- Under the guidance of Dr. David Hadorn, a team of researchers is conducting a review and synthesis of the literature in preparation for the initial panel meetings.
- A final call for nomination of members for the five panels was issued in mid-July. Each panel is now fully populated with a combination of specialists, family physicians, and administration/research experts.
- A news release, designed to inform the public about the project and to identify realistic expectations, was issued on July 26, 1999.

As you can see, THE UPDATE has a new look, consistent with the logo developed for the project. Contrary to a current rumour, there is no plan to produce WCWL baseball caps.

John J. McGurran, Project Director

WCWL Partners Meet in Calgary

More than 50 WCWL partners, panel members and co-chairs, staff, and guests participated in a two-day meeting in Calgary on June 25 & 26, 1999. The meeting was called to obtain input from the 19 participating WCWL organizations on the progress of the project, and to learn through presentations by national and international researchers and leaders in this field.

Following two days of discussion, consensus was achieved on several key issues. The clinical panels will attempt to include, as has been done in New Zealand and elsewhere, social factors in their deliberations. The notion of setting priorities across conditions, while methodologically challenging and controversial, will be addressed by the WCWL Steering Committee. Finally, the decision to develop point-count priority scoring systems employing predictive factors with numerical weights was also endorsed. The latter two elements are discussed in the July issue of THE UPDATE.

Clinical Panel Update

Over the past months, the membership of the five clinical panels has been finalized. Panels consist of, on average, 13 members, with the majority being from the host regional health authority and the remainder from other centres. Clinical specialists in the area under review comprise the largest single group. In addition, family physicians, specialists in related fields, and research or administration experts are included.

Initial meetings for the panels are scheduled to occur in Calgary according to the following schedule:

Hip & Knee Replacement	October 14
Cataract Surgery	October 15
Children's Mental Health	October 16
General Surgery	October 17
MRI Scanning	October 18

The second and subsequent meetings will be scheduled as required.

WCWL Media Release

On July 26, with the assistance of the Calgary office of Hill and Knowlton Canada, a news release was issued to national media via Canada Newswire. The purpose of the release was twofold: to announce the regional health authorities selected to host each of the 5 clinical panels, and to articulate a realistic view of the scope of this undertaking.

Hill and Knowlton helped to draft the material, worked with the communications staff of the five host sites, and coordinated requests for interviews with Dr. Tom Noseworthy and others associated with the project.

More than 20 journalists expressed an interest in or discussed the release. Interviews were given by Dr. Tom Noseworthy, John McGurran, and Stephen Lewis. Known media coverage included National Post, Calgary Herald, Edmonton Journal, Vancouver Sun, Regina Leader Post, Medical Post, Saskatoon Star Phoenix, Sing Tao, CBC National Radio News, CHED Radio, CHQR Radio, CBC Radio Calgary, CBC Radio Saskatoon, CBC Radio Edmonton, CBC French Radio (Radio Canada), A Channel Television, and CFRN Television.

Waiting in the United Kingdom

Professor John Yates, keynote speaker at the June WCWL meeting in Calgary, shared knowledge gained over 30 years of work in health service administration and research in the National Health Service in the UK. Professor Yates' primary message was to focus less on waiting lists or numbers and more on the length of time the patients must wait for needed services: in other words, to maintain a patient-centered approach.

In his talk and subsequent discussion, Professor Yates described several factors that explain long waits for care: inaccurate data on lists, insufficient funding, inefficient institutions and scheduling, infinite demand, insufficient staff commitment and inappropriate system structure. One of the most effective ways to drive down wait times is through the actions of committed staff.

In summary, many of the lessons learned in the UK about the organization and management of lists could be of value to the WCWL in Canada. John Yates is an Honorary Professor at the University of Birmingham and the Director of the Inter-Authority Comparisons and Consultancy.

Welcome New WCWL Staff Member

I am pleased to welcome Ms. Katerina Carastathis as full-time secretary to the project. Katerina completed her B.Sc. with specialization in molecular genetics at the University of Alberta in 1997. She then served as the Executive Assistant of On Spec magazine. Katerina can be reached at 780-492-1012 or at katerina.carastathis@ualberta.ca.

UPDATE

WESTERN CANADA WAITING LIST PROJECT

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