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## WCWL Moves to Calgary

The WCWL secretariat has moved to the Department of Community Health Sciences at the University of Calgary. Contact information is as follows:

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## Upcoming Events

- Oct 2-5, 2001 — International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua) 2001 Conference, Buenos Aires, Argentina  
<http://www.isqua.org.au/isquaPagesConferences.html>
- Feb 15-16, 2002 — Diagnostics and Solutions: Is the Canadian Model of Health Care Sustainable? The 7th Annual Conference of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada  
<http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/programs/misc>

## Progress Report

The relocation of the Project to the Department of Community Health Sciences at the University of Calgary brings WCWL into an environment that has a strong research presence in health economics and health services. Financial support from Health Canada's Health Transition Fund ends on September 30. We have been successful in our request for interim funding to continue our empirical work and to sustain the Western Canadian Partnership. During this six-month interval, we will concentrate on two action research streams: one will be the development of benchmark waiting times, and the other will be the evaluation of the implementation of the tools.

Planning is underway to hold a Partners' meeting for strategic direction through the next six months and beyond. This will take place in early November at a Calgary location to be announced. Details will be communicated via e-mail when the date is set

In preparation for the November meeting, we propose to bring together a panel of research partners for a one-day consultation on the methodological approaches to both research streams.

There is ongoing consultation with Western provincial ministries of health and regional health authorities' senior management about the ongoing work plan for implementation evaluation.

Seven papers have been submitted for publication and four more are being written. Of the seven, five describe the work of our clinical panels and were submitted to specialty clinical journals. The sixth (one of our series of background papers) deals with point-count systems as linear models and the seventh with standardization of the definition of waiting time. The papers currently being written include: a broad overview of the WCWL Project; a synopsis of the views of the health authorities and the public; an approach to establishing benchmark waiting times; and a discussion of waiting lists as a measure of distributive justice.

# Application of Waiting List Prioritization Tools: Views of the Public and of the Health Authorities

## The Problem

- Waiting for elective health care services is a hot-button issue in Canada and in most publicly funded systems.
- Due to the lack of standardized definitions, procedures to provide elective health care, and information systems, health authorities (providers) and governments are at a loss to reliably describe or rectify the situation.
- Opinion polls and the media point to widespread dissatisfaction among the public and physicians with the current state of the system.
- Long wait times are problematic in the context of the Canada Health Act (1984), which requires the provinces to provide, among other things, reasonable access to insured health care services on uniform terms and conditions.

## The WCWL Approach

- The Western Canada Waiting List Project (WCWL) produced point-count prioritization tools in five case types: general surgery, cataract surgery, hip and knee replacement, children's mental health, and MRI scanning.
- These tools were developed by multidisciplinary clinical panels to model clinical judgement of relative urgency or priority of patients awaiting elective health care.
- They were intended to be used by clinical specialists and implemented by regional health authorities to provide fair and timely access to elective care based on urgency.

## The Question

- Are these tools and the changes they will entail in the health care system appropriate and acceptable to the public and the health authorities?

## Method (Public Opinion)

- The view of the general public was obtained through focus groups held in seven major cities in Western Canada. Random digit telephone recruitment resulted in 66 participants as follows:
  - a balance of males (53%) and females (47%)
  - a mix of ages ranging from 18 to 75 years and of socio-economic status (educational attainment and household income)
  - the majority (61%) reported first hand experience with waiting for health care

- all scored at least 3 of 5 points on a scale assessing their level of concern about waiting for elective care

## Method (Health Authorities)

- The views of the health authorities (providers) were obtained through a series of semi-structured interviews in seven large metropolitan centres in Western Canada, yielding:
  - 39 interviews conducted involving 66 respondents
  - a balance of senior management, including CEOs (29%), clinicians (36%), and clinical admin staff (35%)
  - 19 (29%) of the interviewees were actively involved in the WCWL Project

## Findings

- Public — high levels of concern about the current state of waiting lists
- Public — generally unaware of how the system operates
- Public — the most important criterion is urgency or severity; all others are secondary
- Public — supportive of the point-count concept in which higher priority criteria scores result in a relatively shorter wait time
- Public — aware of the challenges of implementation and administration of the tools
- Providers — considerable variability exists in current prioritization methods
- Providers — WCWL tools judged acceptable for application across entire regions and provinces
- Providers — would result in standard data and ability to make comparisons across regions and provinces
- Providers — successful implementation will depend on appropriate change management processes and education
- Providers — as the health system is inherently resistant to change, implementation requires strategic approach

## Conclusion

While neither the general public nor the providers sample is technically representative, their messages provide valuable information to governments and health authorities which may choose to implement prioritization criteria.

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# 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](mailto:john.mcgurran@ualberta.ca) visit our website at <http://www.wcwl.org>

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