



Society of Rural Physicians of Canada
Société de la médecine rurale du Canada

Media Release

Romanow Rural Deficient - say Country Doctors

HAILEYBURY ON /Feb 6th, 2002/ - Romanow has issued his interim report on the future of health care in Canada today with a disappointingly urban bias. He has relegated discussion of rural issues that affect 30 percent of the Canadian population to three paragraphs in a 87 page report.

The fragile hopes it holds out for rural populations (telemedicine, incentive grants) are disappointing in how superficial they appear. One wonders if Mr. Romanow is aware of rural Canada's importance to our country's economy, social fabric, myths, legends and song. He certainly ignores the huge challenges in delivering health care to a large part of the population scattered over a geography no other country must face. These challenges form a fundamental part of our health care system and will not be addressed by urban, centralist solutions.

For the rest of the document, there seems to be an emphasis towards "specialists and primary care providers". What about generalists (medical and non-medical) in rural areas, who function on all levels of care, needing the support of a different type of system? Extensive discussion on primary care reform and privatization is done without addressing potential deleterious effects on rural Canadian populations being able to even maintain the get second class health care they now can get.

As the Honourable Allan Rock, former federal Minister of Health has said,. " The true two-tier health system in Canada is found in the gap between urban and rural ." The Interim Report by Romanow will worsen this gap. The SRPC feels a more thoughtful consideration of the national systemic importance of rural health care and the challenges facing it can be found in the Kirby Senate Report issued last week. We urge Mr. Romanow to take note of the discussions held in that document.

On the other hand, the SRPC welcomes Romanow's call for innovative federal/provincial collaboration and more inclusion of provider groups in long term planning. We would like to see specific suggestions on how this should come about.

The first place to look would be in a National Rural Health Strategy, with significant, recurrent federal money earmarked for addressing rural health issues on a national and provincial level. This type of plan could pioneer new benchmarks for federal/provincial cooperation, while revitalizing health care delivery, both rural and urban.

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Contacts

Peter Hutten-Czapski, SRPC President, Haileybury Ontario 705-672-2442 or 672-2384
SRPC National Office, Shawville Quebec, Mr Lee Teperman 819-647-3971

About the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada

The Society of Rural Physicians of Canada (SRPC) is the national voice of Canadian rural physicians. Founded in 1992, the SRPC's mission is to provide leadership for rural physicians and to promote sustainable conditions and equitable health care for rural communities.

On behalf of its members and the Canadian public, SRPC performs a wide variety of functions, such as developing and advocating health delivery mechanisms, supporting rural doctors and communities in crisis, promoting and delivering rural medical education, encouraging and facilitating research into rural health issues, and fostering communication among rural physicians and other groups with an interest in rural health care.

The SRPC is a voluntary professional organization representing over 1,100 of Canada's rural physicians and comprising 5 regional divisions spanning the country