



Taking the “care” out of health care

Ontario Minister of Health Elizabeth Witmer wants to take the “care” out of health care. Literally, anyway. A confidential Jan. 13, 1998, email document from head of the health ministry’s communication and information department states: “This is to advise you that the minister has

clearly stated she wants us to reduce as much as possible the use of the word CARE in the various written communications for speeches, speaking notes, correspondence, etc., when making reference to the reform, restructuring, vision, etc. processes currently going on.”

Ministry staff are instructed to write about the “Health System, instead of the Health Care System [and

to] use health services instead of health care services.”

Jerry Hurley, coordinator of the Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis at McMaster University, says there is “a certain irony is wanting to drop the word care. A lot of people would say a caring attitude, or the ability to have one, has already been eroded in our system.”

While he didn’t want to comment

Canadians busy bringing family medicine to Bosnia

Members of a Canadian medical project are putting Bosnia on the fast track to developing a solid family medicine system. Dr. Geoffrey Hodgetts, project director of the Queen’s University Family Medicine Development Program in Bosnia–Herzegovina, says the war-ravaged country must make a move while it still has international attention and financial support. “Bosnia has the potential to put things together that otherwise might take decades,” says Hodgetts, an associate professor in family medicine and director of the Family Medicine Residency Program at Queen’s.

The former Yugoslavian health care system was expensive, institution based and technology driven, and had a weak primary care system. The University of Sarajevo’s

dean of medicine first visited Queen’s in 1995 to learn about family medicine. Over the next 18 months, Hodgetts made 5 trips to Bosnia as a special adviser. After looking at various models of family medicine, Bosnian leaders decided Canada was the country to emulate.

The 3-year project, launched in March 1997, received \$2.9-million from the Canadian International Development Agency. The team has 5 permanent members, including project manager David Packer, and 3 project assistants. As well, members of the Queen’s faculty lecture about their specialties.

Hodgetts works in partnership with the medical faculties at Sarajevo, Tuzla and Mostar, and the federation’s Ministry of Health. The program focuses on 4 areas: reforming the undergraduate curriculum, developing a postgraduate program, developing academic departments of family medicine and integrating family medicine into the health care system.

The last component entails diplomatic work that consumes a lot of Hodgetts’ time. “It’s like pushing an elephant up a hill,” he says. In Bosnia, family medicine is considered the lowliest of professions;



Dr. Geoffrey Hodgetts in front of some of Sarajevo’s bullet-scarred buildings; the yellow tape in the background warns about land-mines

Hodgetts attempts to connect faculty with government, and to educate the public and government.

Despite the difficulties, he says there has been remarkable progress in the first year. Departments of family medicine have been established in Sarajevo and Tuzla, and the first 12 residents are working in a family medicine teaching centre in Tuzla.

The World Health Organization, which is encouraging a more coordinated approach to implementing family medicine, has selected Hodgetts’ project to take the leadership role. “We have a terrific opportunity to accomplish a great deal over the next few years,” he says. — © Barbara Sibbald



A shell hole provides ventilation in this Bosnian clinic