



Query

I think of the looming federal election with profound ease. Which party, I wonder, will benefit me? Selfish thinking, I admit, but that's what it has come down to. Which party will train more doctors and nurses, which party will dream up feasible ways to resuscitate medicare, which party will close the technology gap with the United States?

I've played this game before. I've listened to politicians position themselves as saviours of medicare, voted for them, and subsequently watched things get worse. I've given my vote to whichever party talks the most about something I hold dear: a publicly funded health care system open to all.

Despairing moods aside, I still do believe in medicare. No longer do people have to lose their homes and farms, like my grandmother did when my grandfather was dying of lung cancer. The problem, though, does not lie merely in our ability to offer care to those who need it, regardless of their means; the problem is with the kind of care people are actually receiving. That is where the system is falling down.

Do I have any solutions? Not really. I'm a peon, a mere family doctor working in a bureaucracy that dwarfs my personal involvement. My job is to see patients, and I leave it to politicians to devise ways to "fix" — I detest that word, which all the politicians use — the system.

Some want privatization. Others want to throw more money at the beast. Each party has its platform, and all are equally sanctimonious.

So, what would I like instead? I'd like an honest commitment from a political party to reverse the drift toward privati-

zation in this country. I'm convinced that privatization will indeed create two-tier health care — and, yes, I've read about the studies in countries with different tiers of coverage and how they're supposedly doing fine, and cheaply. Yet I've never worked in those systems. I work in this one, whose principles are virtuous: that everyone is equal; that problems with greater severity are dealt with sooner. In theory, we have one of the fairest and most magnanimous systems in the world.

Every day I see that system erode a little more. Instead of tax cuts designed to secure the wallet vote, I'd like to see that same money invested in health care. What do Canadians care about more? A few hundred dollars a year, or expeditious, first-rate, equitable care when they're sick?

It's not that I'm simply advocating feeding the beast. No, I want the money to be tied to innovation, so those who deliver better health care are rewarded for their initiative. I ask which party will benefit *me*, but I really mean *all of us*.

Perhaps there should be a medicare one-issue party, like the Marijuana Party of Canada, to force politicians to do more thinking about health care and force them to stop thinking in terms of "fixes" — there aren't any quick ones — and more in terms of nursing our publicly funded system back to health. The political parties are addicted to the "fix." The sooner they start talking about improving the system as opposed to fixing it, the sooner some progress will be made. After all, how grandiloquent is it to think, with one bill or budget, that there could be a fix?

— Dr. Ursus