Health Ministers Commit to International Co-operation on Health System Performance Measurement

Health Ministers from Canada, France, Mexico, the U.K. and U.S. capped off an important international Conference on health systems performance measurement with a roundtable discussion. Ministers shared views about the political challenges they face in developing measurement frameworks that support ongoing health system improvement.

"Even as we celebrate the health achievements of citizens across the OECD member countries, we must recognize that our nations face a number of important challenges -- rising demand for health services, concerns about health costs and efficiency and pressing inequalities in health," said OECD Secretary General Donald Johnston, who chaired the Ministerial roundtable. "The OECD Health Project will make a major contribution to addressing these challenges. International comparisons can help us identify best practices to improve performance in individual countries' health care systems."

Emphasizing that public confidence in health care is a key priority for all Ministers, Canada's Health Minister, The Hon. Allan Rock, underlined the importance of performance measurement and reporting. "The value of performance measurement lies in its ability to inform our health policy decision making," said Minister Rock. "It can help us to ensure citizens everywhere are able to obtain good health, lead productive lives and ensure that health systems work to their benefit."

"In France there's nothing more political, in the true sense of the word, than our public health systems," said French Minister Bernard Kouchner. "I believe in total transparency, it is with patients that one must decide what a health system will look like - it must be a democratic process with full public participation." He added that it is unacceptable to restrict the innovations to developed countries when there are pressing needs in developing countries. "We have Médecins sans frontières (Doctors Without Borders) now we need Malades sans frontières (Patients Without Borders)."

Mexico's Secretary of Health, Julio Frenk highlighted some of the major initiatives underway in Mexico to build the political and social institutions it needs, including health systems. "While performance measures have practical value in assessment of past decisions, it also offers enormous advantages for future planning and decision making," said Secretary Frenk. "International comparisons are essential to shared learning in that they can play a key role in democratizing the health care systems of countries like Mexico while achieving our universal goal of better health for all."
“The importance of better performance measurement cannot be overstated for our health service,” said John Hutton, UK Minister of State for Health. “It will lead to better informed decisions, better value for money for the taxpayer and consumer alike and, in our context, hopefully stronger support for public health provision.”

“Despite our different models and health care delivery approaches, we are all pursuing the same goal - how do we improve our health systems and keep them safe,” said U.S. representative Edward Sondyk who spoke for U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tommy Thompson. “The health of our citizens must come first.”

Called *Measuring Up: Improving Health Systems Performance in OECD Countries*, the three day conference is part of an ambitious three-year health project launched by the OECD in May 2001 to provide concrete information to national policy makers, helping them to improve their systems’ performance and make difficult resource allocation decisions. The Health Project will ultimately address the public policy dilemma of deciding the appropriate amount of resources to be devoted to health care, as well as how these resources should be financed and allocated.

In addition to the Ministerial Roundtable, other Conference highlights included:

- A luncheon address by Roy Romanow, Chair of the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada. This Conference recognizes that some common challenges exist across jurisdictions that require evidence-based solutions and collaboration,” said Commissioner Romanow. “The real value of measuring health outcomes and sharing lessons learned is that will lead to better quality health care.”

- A keynote address by internationally recognized Dr. David Naylor, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto. Dr. Naylor spoke of the challenge of improving health systems, which are complex in the extreme. “Better health care isn’t about drawing grand blueprints and pulling big levers. It starts with tenacious work to understand what works and doesn’t. It must feature the engagement of countless providers and patients, institutions and communities.”

Further information about the conference as well as key papers delivered are available on the Web at: http://www.oecd.org/els/health/canconf/index.htm.

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