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Dr. Doris Kyerematang appears on Canada AM on July 4, 2007.

Foreign-trained doctor practices success in Canada

Updated Wed. Jul. 4 2007 12:03 PM ET

Canada AM

This week on Canada AM, a series will focus on issues surrounding immigration. The first part of the series looks at the struggles of new immigrants to have their foreign credentials recognized in their efforts to

find jobs in Canada.

Despite the fact that many Canadians are finding it hard to get a family doctor, many foreign-trained doctors are finding it hard to obtain work, according to a medical practitioner familiar with the experience.

Dr. Doris Kyerematang has just completed a term as the president of the Manitoba College of Family and Physicians and owns and operates her own clinic. However, her most recent success would not have happened if she had followed the advice she received when she first arrived in the country.

"I was told I couldn't practice here," Kyerematang told CTV's Canada AM. "It was quite a shock. Everywhere the message was, there are no opportunities for international medical graduates."

Kyerematang is originally from Ghana and obtained her medical degree in Norway in 1992 where she practiced until 1995.

She eventually came to Canada, moving to Winnipeg with her family and had to enroll in a two-year family medicine residency program at the University of Manitoba before she could practice.

Kyerematang cites the limited number of residencies open to foreign-trained doctors as playing the biggest role in restricting the access of foreign trained medical professionals to positions in this country.

"The biggest area definitely was the lack of positions. With the lack

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- 📺 Canada AM: Dr. Doris Kyerematang
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of positions, information was so guarded," Kyerematang told Canada AM. "One did not know where to go to get information on what one needed to do to secure even one of these two positions that were being offered in Manitoba."

According to a 2006 report from the Fraser Institute, Canada needs to rely on foreign-trained doctors to help reconcile the doctor shortage in the country.

In November, the College of Family Physicians of Canada said the family doctor shortage is hampering efforts to decrease wait times for health care.

Foreign doctors are finding it hard to get jobs at a time when **approximately five million Canadians do not have family doctors.** Currently, around 25 per cent of Canada's family doctors are now international medical graduates.

To increase the numbers of foreign trained doctors, Kyerematang feels that one strategy would be to make the evaluation exam for medical graduates more accessible and available for medical professionals who would like to take it. Kyerematang speaks from personal experience on this issue.

"There was no exam location in Winnipeg," she said. "So I had to travel into Toronto ... For a new immigrant there was a bit of cost involved with that."

While Kyerematang never gave up in her efforts to become a medical professional in this country, many of her potential colleagues have ventured down different career paths.

"The word on the streets was in Canada, 'Oh there are international medical graduates who have been here years and years and some are doing other jobs. It's a total career change. Look at doing something else. There's no hope'," Kyerematang said.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this series please email them to immigrationquestions@ctv.ca

NOTE:

Canada's population is 31.6 million, so 16.8% of Canadians do not have a primary care doctor and must use the ER for primary care. The US census bureau reports that 15.8% of Americans were uninsured at some point during 2006.

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Family doctor shortage major hurdle to health care: study

Last Updated: Thursday, November 2, 2006 | 2:25 PM ET

[CBC News](#)

A family physician shortage is among the biggest hurdles contributing to wait times for basic and specialized health care, according to a new report from the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

The report, released Thursday, is based on a Decima research poll commissioned by the college that suggests millions of Canadians still don't have a family doctor, even after spending months looking for one.

According to the poll, about five million Canadians, or 17 per cent of the population, do not have a family doctor.

Among those doctorless people, nearly two million of them, or 38 per cent, have attempted to find a family physician in the past year, but have failed.

Not having a family physician makes it harder for Canadians to get referred to a specialist, which means they often have to wait for advanced medical care, the college report concludes.

And while it's valiant that Ottawa is making efforts to tackle wait times for certain specialized procedures, it shouldn't ignore the scarcity of family doctors, said Dr. Calvin Gutkin, the college's executive director, in a statement.

"Every Canadian should have the opportunity to have a family doctor. Tackling family physician shortages should be the first step in any wait time strategy."

"Wait time strategies need to address the complete patient experience. If you ask most patients, the clock starts ticking when they see their family doctor or recognize the need to see a physician."

Quebec in dire need of doctors

The family physician shortage is particularly acute in Quebec, where nearly 29 per cent of the population doesn't have a doctor.

The president of the Quebec College of Family Physicians, Bernard Lessard, says he gets up to 20 e-mails a day from people exasperated at the impossible task of finding a doctor to call their own.

Many have given up. "They probably don't try [anymore] because they think it's going to be impossible, or they know what the situation is in their community. But this is a disaster," he told CBC.

The shortage ends up costing the government much more than if people had access to primary care, the report says. People end up going to the emergency room more often if they don't have a doctor to call.

The report recommends a study group be established to develop and recommend primary care wait time benchmarks for finding a doctor and seeing

them.

The Decima Research survey was conducted between Sept. 14 and 17, 2006. The survey polled 1,019 Canadians aged 18 and over. Decima says the results are accurate plus or minus 3.1 per cent of the time, 19 times out of 20.

Canada gets poor marks for primary care

Canada's health-care system was also criticized Thursday in an international study of primary health care.

Doctors in seven countries were polled on their professional practices by the Commonwealth Fund, a private, non-partisan foundation that supports health research.

According to the survey, less than a quarter of Canadian doctors use electronic medical records — a paltry showing compared to other countries, such as the Netherlands, where 98 per cent of doctors keep electronic notes.

Canada is also falling behind in the realms of after-hours care, multidiscipline team approaches to treating chronic illnesses, and incentives for doctors to become better physicians.

Countries like New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Australia and Germany surpass Canada in quality and efficiency, with only the United States scoring lower in some categories, the survey concluded.

With files from the Canadian Press

Survey: 5 million have no family doctor

Last Updated: Thursday, November 25, 2004 | 5:47 PM ET

[CBC News](#)

Five million Canadians don't have a family doctor, the College of Family Physicians of Canada said Thursday as it released a policy paper on fixing the problem.

Among other measures, the college wants more positions in medical schools dedicated to training family doctors. It said that by 2008, the number should be raised from 2,100 to 2,500.

- INDEPTH: [Family doctors](#)



It also wants a new federal-provincial fund to address waiting times, set up in September, to be spread beyond the five areas of specialty that Prime Minister Paul Martin and the provincial and territorial leaders had identified.

The group cited a Decima poll it had commissioned in early September in which more than 2,000 people were surveyed about health care.

In addition to determining that 16 per cent of respondents are not under the care of a family doctor, the poll found:

- 46 per cent of people think governments should measure waiting times from the time a person first seeks advice from a family doctor about a medical problem, not from the time he or she first sees a specialist, as is the case now.
- It took between three months and a year to find a family doctor for 33 per cent of those who reported they had had problems tracking down a physician accepting new patients.

The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

"Why is there this gap between what Canadians say they want and value, and what the system, those responsible for the system, seem to value?" said Dr. Calvin Gutkin, the executive director of the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

Fixing the shortage of family doctors won't be as simple as increasing the number of training spots, Public Health Minister Carolyn Bennett said in a speech as the college opened a three-day meeting in Toronto Thursday.

Bennett, who is a family doctor by profession, said many medical students don't want to choose it as a specialty.

There's a perception that they can pay off their enormous student loans more quickly by choosing to specialize as a heart surgeon or oncologist, she said.

Some medical schools also foster an attitude of "almost disdain and mockery" toward family doctors, Bennett added.



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News Releases

THE COLLEGE OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS OF CANADA TAKES ACTION TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO CARE FOR PATIENTS IN CANADA

**Targets: 95% to have a family physician by 2012
Every Canadian should have access to a personal family physician and a
registered nurse and/or nurse practitioner**

(WINNIPEG – October 11, 2007) At the annual Family Medicine Forum underway in Winnipeg, The College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) today announced progressive steps to improve access to care for all patients in Canada. This includes specific goals to improve primary care wait times, access to family physicians, and inter-professional collaboration between family doctors and nurses.

A Decima research poll commissioned by the CFPC and released today, confirms that 86% of Canadians have a family doctor. This leaves 14%, or approximately five million* Canadians still without a family doctor. Of this number, more than two million (41%) have tried to find a family doctor and were not successful.

“Evidence strongly supports better health outcomes for those with access to family physicians, states Dr. Tom Bailey, CFPC President. “The CFPC believes that every Canadian should have a personal family physician. To this end we are challenging all governments and health authorities to increase the current 86% of Canadians with a family doctor to a target of 95% in every community across the country to have a personal family physician by 2012.”

“A target of 95% by 2012 will move us closer to more timely access to primary care for patients as well as more highly specialized services to which patients may be referred,” adds Dr. Calvin Gutkin, CFPC Executive Director and CEO. “Ensuring timely access must reflect the patient’s full wait time experience. It begins with every Canadian having a family doctor. The CFPC believes that this target can be achieved by working with governments and other key stakeholders to implement strategies for family physician training, recruitment and retention.”

“A key strategy to improving access to care will be enhanced support for collaborative care,” says Dr. Ruth Wilson, the CFPC’s President-elect. “Today the CFPC and the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) are pleased to announce their agreement to a vision for improved access to care – a vision that offers each Canadian the opportunity to have care provided by his or her personal family physician working together with a registered nurse and/or nurse practitioner.”

IMPROVING ACCESS TO CARE FOR PATIENTS IN CANADA

“It is all about Canadians having the right provider at the right time,” says Kaaren Neufeld, CNA President-elect. “CNA is pleased to join the CFPC today in releasing an historic joint Vision Statement on improving access to collaborative inter-professional care in family

practice and primary care settings which will have positive impacts on patient access to the health system.”

About CFPC

The College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) is the voice of family medicine in Canada. Representing 19,450 members across the country, it is the professional organization responsible for establishing standards for the training, certification and lifelong education of family physicians and for advocating on behalf of the specialty of family medicine, family physicians and their patients. The CFPC accredits postgraduate family medicine training in Canada's 17 medical schools.

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* Using the estimated Canadian population of 32 million (as reported by Stats Canada) the CFPC has inferred that based on 14% approximately 5 million Canadians are without a family doctor.

Survey Information

Between August 22 and September 4, 2007, Decima Research Inc. conducted a national telephone survey of 2,014 Canadians over the age of 18 years. This survey has a confidence level of +/- 2.2% 19 times out of 20.

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