HEALTH CARE SUSTAINABILITY IN CANADA — WE NEED TO TALK
The risk of unnecessary testing is more than physical

WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

MORE THAN FISCAL
Sustainability is not always about costs and services. It is also about protecting and expanding health care resources to ensure quality future care for all Canadians. It represents the health of our population; comprising many values such as efficiency, compassion, and quality.

Sustainability is also about respecting the limits of health care resources; unnecessary testing can put a strain on those resources. The cost is not just physical, as unnecessary diagnostic testing not only impacts harm on the body but leads to an increase in more tests — more impact on the already overburdened system. Although many people believe that increasing better-known barriers is the solution, in fact, a combination of all ages of an increasing population, the aging costs of services, and increased usage is the problem. It’s up to everyone to have a conversation, and change the culture of unnecessary and routine testing to ensure that health care resources go to the people who need it the most.

What could $660 million of savings buy per year?

8,250 long-term care beds
1,900 in Alberta alone

2,850 hospital beds in acute care

3,000 doctors

THE HEALTH VARIABLE

When unnecessary testing happens, it not only increases the cancer mortality rate by expanding the patient to access radiation, but it also results in follow-up tests being done, which increases exposure even further.

The radiation exposure from three or four chest CT scans (CT) is roughly equivalent to that experienced by atomic bomb survivors in Japan who were located one to two miles from “ground zero.”

THE POPULATION VARIABLE

Health care user profiles

DO WE NEED A CULTURE CHANGE?

Communicating risk
An open dialogue between patients and healthcare providers can result in good decisions about whether or not a test is relevant, helpful, or necessary.

When good choices are made, everyone benefits as valuable resources are used on following up false positives and reducing testing for high-risk patients or programs that improve community health.

Four Questions Patients Can Ask:

1. Do I really need this test, treatment, or procedure?
2. What are the downsides?
3. Are there simpler, safer options?
4. What happens if I do nothing?

OUR FUTURE...

A linked online records system has been shown to reduce repeat CT scans.

41% of lab tests have been repeated within 18 days

13% of CT scans have been repeated within 18 days

The frequency of repeat imaging is lower in a geographical subset of Ontario, where a linked online radiology system is employed. The adoption of a two-step, entire Emergency Medical Records (EMR) system and a radiology system would help reduce unnecessary and redundant medical testing by viewing all patient history, as well as costs associated with that particular test.

Show the costs
The frequency of unnecessary testing would be reduced with a cost per test, which would help people afford the proper tests, which is more affordable.

Lisa Kozokowsky

Health care spending as a percentage over the last few years


OPR spending as a percentage over the last few years