



- SERGE J. TAILLON, CIHI COLUMNIST -

Effective Communication — a critical success factor

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In today's health care swirl, keeping abreast of recent developments and new knowledge is a challenge. Consider this ~ each year, about 400,000 new references are added to MEDLINE. For most, although a very important tool, MEDLINE is only one of many sources of information.

In that context, reaching and "influencing" key stakeholders can be a difficult task. While technology offers tremendous promise, it is also true that nothing can truly replace the human touch. For example, Statistics Canada's Household Internet Survey showed that the proportion of Canadians using the Web to obtain health information grew from 10% in 1998 to 23% in 2000. However another survey, conducted in 2001, found that 7 in 10 Canadians would still rather talk to their physician about their health. While face-to-face meetings probably remain the modality of choice, in this beautiful but vast country where more than 1.5 million Canadians work in health care and social services, common sense dictates that one must use a variety of communications tools.

In recent years, CIHI has been diligent in developing a variety of outreach initiatives and tools. Moreover, we are constantly looking for ways to do better. These initiatives include an enhanced media relations program, a newly-developed Web site, e-mail, video-conferencing, sponsorship of events and conferences such as the recent e-Health 2002 Conference and, yes, the back-to-basics tool...travelling across Canada and talking with people about CIHI's body of work, soliciting feedback and exchanging ideas as to how we can best move forward together.

I always enjoy these opportunities and evidently I'm not alone! At our annual e-Health Conference, recently held in Vancouver, we attracted a record breaking 1,400 participants. Among other things, this participation demonstrates the value people continue to place in networking opportunities and learning first hand about current and emerging trends in health care.

As well, keeping in step with today's e-world, on May 10th, CIHI launched its redeveloped corporate Website (www.cihi.ca). This initiative reflects our commitment to improving, enhancing and providing services available to our stakeholders and clients in a timelier manner. For example, our new feature "Find a statistics" gives you free access to selected data. We have a number of e-products that are now available on our Web site, including electronic hospital comparative reports, which are more versatile and geared to helping you in your decision-making processes.

Finally, this past year CIHI has expanded and enhanced its media relations program. We believe this is one of the most important and effective tools for disseminating key findings from relevant reports to the Canadian public. The results are positive; we have seen the number of newspaper articles written about our media releases

double that of last year, both in the national and regional media.

An excellent example of this is the release of our third annual report on *Health Care in Canada 2002*, on May 29th. Perhaps you caught the story on television or read about it in your newspaper.

Our report showcases new and updated information on Canada's health care system and focuses on three areas in detail with new information: outcomes of care for specific diseases and procedures, public health programs and results as well as and medication use and expenditures.

Measuring outcomes is an ongoing challenge. While information contained in our report is only a start, it represents a significant advance on what was available compared to a few years ago. For example, did you know that, across the country:

- 19.2% of patients died in hospital within 30 days of an initial hospitalization for a stroke between 1997/98 and 1999/2000; similarly, the death rate following a heart attack was 12.6%? Or
- readmission rates (e.g. unplanned return to hospital within 28 days due to a related health problem) were 7.3% for AMI patients and 6.4% for asthma?

While many of our health regions converge towards the national average, some clearly do better while others could make improvements. Of course, we are grateful for the tremendous media coverage that our report received. However, we are most proud of the impact that this report (and some of our other reports) is having on our collective quest to continually improve care.

Increasingly, we are aware that health care administrators, trustees, care providers and others are using the health indicator information to examine more closely what is happening in their region. This is leading to the sharing of best practices and action to improve care. Clearly, that is the *raison d'être* behind this annual report - providing the facts to help those in the health care system to improve care, and ultimately improve the health of Canadians. In the near future, we intend to publish illustrative examples and case studies around this exciting work.... stay tuned!

