

Erin mom slams Canada's decaying health-care system

WASHINGTON—An Erin mother told a Washington audience Jan. 30 that her loss of faith in the quality of Canadian health care has forced her to seek treatment in the United States for her severely deformed son.

Sharon Holmes, whose seven-year-old son, Michael, was born with Treacher-Collins Syndrome, a condition which left him with severe facial deformity, said in a speech to health officials that a decline in Canadian health care will also leave other Canadians with sub-standard care unless they seek alternative treatment.

"We're over-regulated and quality is diminishing," she said at the annual meeting of the Washington-based National Committee for Quality Health Care. "Every time I see another Treacher-Collins child, I weep because I know that we won't have the best quality care."

Ms. Holmes' luncheon speech was the highlight of the one-day conference to compare the U.S. and Canadian health care systems. It came at a time when many Americans are expressing dissatisfaction with their own health system and are pointing to the Canadian medicare system as a cheaper and more efficient model.

But Ms. Holmes said Canadian under-funding of the health care system has driven the best doctors south. Patients have to follow if they want first-class treatment, she said.

Ms. Holmes sought help from the Humana Hospital-Medical City Dallas after Michael's doctor, Ian Munro, accepted a position there and quit the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto out of frustration with the Canadian system.

Dr. Munro is reputed to be one of the best craniofacial surgeons in North America. When he left Toronto, the quality treatment her son received at Sick Kids declined, Ms. Holmes claimed.

"I don't think it's fair that when we need it most, the care is not there. When we lose good physi-

cians, it costs us far more than it would to keep them happy," she said. "One thing I learned right off the bat is that medical care is people."

Ms. Holmes also said the Ontario Hospital Insurance Program is making a mistake by moving away from charging premiums and is now paying for health costs through general revenues. Because Canadians never see a hospital bill, they are not aware of how much money goes to pay health costs.

"I just about fell over when I saw my first hospital bill for Humana when I took my son for treatment in Dallas." One year's treatment and reconstructive surgery has cost about \$50,000, but Ms. Holmes said she could see exactly what the money was being spent on for the first time.

"(Canadians are) paying for our health care but we don't know how much we're paying unless we investigate."

So far, OHIP has been paying Michael's hospital bills in the United States, but the government insurance plan could decide at any time not to fund any more treatment in the United States, the Erin woman said.

In an interview, Ms. Holmes said she supported Canada's

government-funded health system until she had the opportunity to compare it with the American system.

"I walked in (at Humana) and thought, 'this hospital is here to make money' and it shows. I was treated like a customer. I was real impressed, and I saw the waste and indifference (at Sick Kids)," she said.

"There are good people working at Sick Children's but the hospital has lost its heart." Some of the best doctors have left to take positions where they can make more money, mainly in the United States, she said.



A staff breakfast was held Feb. 1 in honor of Barb Singleton who is heading on an overseas holiday for approximately one semester. The staff presented Ms. Singleton with a tombstone that has a Shakespearian quote she uses to tell them "when they've been bad." (Herald photo)

GDHS principal heads for Down Under

Four and a half years of high school work has most people looking for a break.

Students normally find the rest they need during the spring break but have you ever wondered how principals get their rest?

For Barb Singleton, ex-principal of Georgetown District High School, it means taking a six-month holiday. The holiday includes visiting New Zealand, Australia and Japan with two of her sons.

Nine-year-old Matthew and five-year-old Zachary will be accompanying Ms. Singleton on her overseas holiday.

Ms. Singleton, 41, can take the time off because she has been working on a deferred leave plan that allows a teacher to take a semester holiday after working four and a half years.

She will probably not be returning to GDHS after her holiday, leaving the school in the "capable" hands of principal Bryn Davies. Ms. Singleton says she will miss the school.

In a farewell speech to the staff Feb. 1 at a breakfast held in her honor, she said the whole community of Georgetown is a part of the school.

Later she noted the staff's sincerity toward the students as complete people and not just the students they see in the class.

She was also proud of GDHS for having people who could not only teach but were also "professionally strong" in their teaching fields. An example includes two art teachers who are still creating art during their spare time, she said.

Ms. Singleton also called the

teachers an "hilarious group" that not only has individual senses of humor within the group but they also have a collective sense of humor. She said they use humor to help people instead of using sarcastic humor to hurt them. "That's something I'm going to miss," she said.

The staff presented Ms. Singleton with a group shot in which the staff are dressed in costumes such as cowboys, construction workers and garbage cans. The staff signed it.

Ms. Singleton presented the staff with the same picture and wrote on it, "Keep on Smiling. Thanks for the 4½ years together." She also signed it.

She will be returning to the Halton Board of Education system, she said, but she will probably not be returning to GDHS.

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