

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

## WEEKEND

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### What it costs: a doctor's ledger

Re The Murky Waters Of Quebec Extra-Billing (Sept. 20): I have a cardiology clinic in Montreal where I see patients rapidly, many of whom are referred to me by hospitals. The visits are covered by the Quebec health system (and about the same as if I were in a hospital where a doctor has no expenses to cover), but electrocardiograms (ECG) are charged to patients (\$60).

If patients choose to have other tests (such as ECG exercise tests or blood tests) done at the clinic with no wait time instead of through the hospital system, they pay for these (e.g. \$165 for an exercise test). If these tests were billed to the health system, I would receive \$7 per ECG and \$60 per exercise test, again similar to what I would receive working in a hospital. The math is simple. The clinic pays monthly: \$4,500 rent, \$8,000 in salaries for nurse, secretary and receptionist; \$1,000 for other expenses, not counting amortization on equipment. No way could this be covered without extra billing. The government will not assume these additional costs and given ever-increasing health costs, probably shouldn't.

The clinic's options: Close and deprive several thousand patients per year of personalized follow-up, or go completely private, which will also turn away many patients. Quite a few patients have insurance to cover most of these costs. Must the state pay for everything in health care? Flexibility is built into European health systems. Why do we have a problem with this in Canada?

— Peter Bogaty, MD, Montreal