



60 St. Clair Avenue East
Suite 204
Toronto, ON M4T 1N5

NEWS RELEASE

Your Money or Your Life? – Report Card on Cancer Care in Canada

January 28, 2004 – Toronto. The Cancer Advocacy Coalition of Canada (CACC) released its annual Report Card on Cancer Care in Canada today, noting a significant relationship between the operating budget each provincial cancer agency receives from its provincial government and the cancer mortality rate in that province. Overall, British Columbia ranks best, with the lowest mortality and the highest per capita operating budget (money spent directly on screening, surveillance, treatment, supportive care and coordination).

“The east-west gradient in mortality has been well known and historically attributed to the healthier lifestyles and higher socio-economic status in western Canada compared to the east”, said Dr. William Hryniuk, Chair of the CACC. “We have seen that pattern for years but we decided it was time to explore other factors that might be associated with it. We now find an unmistakable correlation between provincial financial support for cancer agencies and cancer mortality. And the correlation coincides exactly with the east-west gradient in cancer mortality.”

The relationship between cancer budgets and mortality does not seem to be related to provincial wealth or the incidence of cancer in each province. The stage of disease when diagnosed is a factor to be explored in future publications, but this information is difficult to obtain and was not available for the current Report Card. The CACC suggests a major contributing factor may be significant differences in availability of prompt and adequate treatment between the provinces.

In other feature articles, the CACC gives an “unacceptable” ranking to seven provinces for their waiting times, while the remaining two are “borderline.” Only BC has acceptable waiting times. Waiting times to see an oncologist, or to begin systemic therapy or radiation therapy, are not improving or are getting worse everywhere but Newfoundland.

For transparency and accountability, three provinces were rated “unacceptable” and three were “borderline.” This measure reflects each province’s ability to provide information on basic questions about waiting times and budgets.

Pat Kelly, a long-time cancer activist and current Board member of the CACC, noted “in previous years we have identified the relationship between organized cancer care and better health outcomes. Provinces that have a strong centralized cancer agency simply produce more cancer survivors than provinces without that organization.” Only Quebec, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island do not have such an agency. Ms Kelly said, “Canada urgently needs to see the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control implemented, with appropriate resources committed from the federal and provincial governments. The Strategy is widely accepted as the right plan for Canada, but it is stalled and this Report Card shows once again that the system is not functioning the way it should.”

The Cancer Advocacy Coalition of Canada is the only full-time, registered, non-profit group dedicated solely to citizen advocacy on cancer issues. Board members are unpaid volunteers, drawn from cancer survivors and health professionals from coast to coast. The full Report Card can be found on the CACC website:

www.canceradvocacycoalition.com

Contacts:

Dr. Bill Hryniuk, Chair: 905-628-5942, cell 905-516-0271

Pat Kelly: 905-637-2840

Carol Loughrey: 506-452-2157

Dr. Jaro Kotalik: 807-343-8126

Dr. Jim Gowing: 519-621-2333 ext 2363

CACC office: 416-538-4874, toll-free 1-877-472-3436