

Cancer Advocacy Coalition releases annual Report Card on Cancer

Toronto, ON, January 31, 2006 – The Cancer Advocacy Coalition of Canada today released its annual evaluation of cancer system performance. *Report Card 2005* feature articles are:

- Analysis of the problems in waiting times, and one province's imaginative approach to ameliorating the emotional effect on patients;
- Comparison of Canada's performance in cancer screening programs with other western countries;
- A detailed discussion of the marked variability from province to province in access to new and expensive life-saving cancer drugs;
- How that variability in access to drugs and organization of programs may be affecting provincial cancer mortality rates in specific diseases such as lymphoma and breast cancer;
- Vivid accounts of the often Herculean efforts to which some patients and their physicians must go to get the best treatment available.

Early each year, CACC polls cancer groups for ideas about subjects they would like the organization to explore. Canada's record with screening programs was highlighted because the ability to detect some cancers early, when they are most treatable, is a key component in any cancer control strategy. Then there is the subject of waiting for cancer treatment after a diagnosis, including the adverse impact of those waits on patients' psychological well-being as well as disease outcomes.

Advances in systemic therapy are the main reasons for recent improvements in cancer survival. But the emergence of new, highly-targeted therapies for cancer that provide better outcomes has clashed head-on with cumbersome and duplicative funding review processes. The inequality in access to these agents across the country is documented in careful detail in *Report Card 2005*. The imbalance in accessing innovative, new and potentially curative drugs starkly illustrates that universal access to health care in Canada is becoming a myth.

Taken separately, the articles describe egregious ills within our cancer care system. Collectively, they paint a picture of a system that, while good in many respects, is often rife with wasteful duplication, foot-dragging and number-fudging; a care setting that is more system-focused than patient-focused.

But the news isn't all bad. The past year was also notable because the federal government recognized the failure to control cancer as an important issue. Election campaign promises to commit additional funding to address problems at the national level should bode well for the future. Important advances by scientists and clinical trials make cancer survival a greater

likelihood for many patients; delivering on election promises could prevent the loss of many additional lives to cancer.

-30-

The Cancer Advocacy Coalition of Canada is the country's only full-time, registered, non-profit cancer group dedicated to citizen advocacy. The CACC is not a charity and operates on unrestricted grants from sponsors based on guidelines that ensure the organization's autonomy. For more information visit our website at www.canceradvocacy.ca

Please contact National Public Relations for interview requests:

Toronto: Anjum Nayyar, (416) 848-1369 anayyar@national.ca; Nila Jacob (416) 848-9862 njacob@national.ca
Montreal: Daniel Brennan (514) 843-2325 dbrennan@national.ca
Calgary: Tara Mason (403) 531-0331 tmason@national.ca
Vancouver: Claire Munroe (604) 691-7393 cmunroe@national.ca