

For immediate release

Aussi disponible en français

VIRTUAL HOSPICE ANSWERS CALL FOR BETTER SUPPORT OF TERMINALLY ILL

Today's Cancer Society report re-affirms need for websites like virtualhospice.ca

May 19, 2010, WINNIPEG - Canadian Virtual Hospice is applauding the Canadian Cancer Society for issuing a report today that highlights the need to increase information and understanding about palliative care.

"These issues are what prompted us to create the Virtual Hospice website," said Dr. Harvey Max Chochinov, the founder of the Manitoba Palliative Care Research Unit and the only Canada Research Chair of Palliative Care. "Palliative care can create remarkable improvements in quality of life – not just for those who are ill, but also for their families and everyone around them. Lack of information can be one of the greatest barriers to receiving quality care."

Today the Canadian Cancer Society released *Canadian Cancer Statistics 2010*, a report that suggests more Canadians would live out their final days at home, rather than in hospital, if they knew more about, and had better access to, palliative care information and services.

The Virtual Hospice website is filled with information about symptom management, emotional and spiritual issues, caregiving, grief and loss that is available to the public and professionals, regardless of where they are located. Over 1,000 people a day visit the national website, which is staffed by a team of palliative care experts headquartered in Winnipeg.

"The most troubling questions about terminal illness often arise in the lonely hours when doctors' offices are closed," Dr. Chochinov explained. "People can turn to the Virtual Hospice 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for answers and support."

Virtual Hospice's "Ask a Professional" service was the first service of its kind to enable people to pose questions online to palliative care experts, and receive a detailed, confidential response. Each question is handled by a team of doctors, nurses and psychosocial specialists with over 100 years of combined experience in palliative care. More than half of the 1,200 questions asked concern a cancer illness.

"People want to know what to expect at the end of life," said Shelly Cory, Executive Director. "They want to plan, to be as prepared as possible. Virtual Hospice helps to ease this difficult time with personalized information and support they can trust."

The website has an interactive map to help people find local programs and services, a glossary of plain-language definitions of medical and legal terms and over 800 listings of books, links and more that have been vetted by the clinical team.

Canadian Virtual Hospice is a bilingual, interactive website funded by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

Visit the website at www.virtualhospice.ca and www.portailpalliatif.ca

BACKGROUNDER ATTACHED

CONTACT: Shelly Cory, Executive Director, 204-477-6285



About Canadian Virtual Hospice

Aussi disponible en français

- The idea of a virtual hospice was conceived by a group of palliative care leaders to address gaps in palliative care for Canadians, whenever they need it, wherever they live.
- Virtual Hospice provides personalized information and support to Canadians with life-limiting illness and their families. Virtual Hospice also provides tools to support health care providers in the delivery of quality palliative care, and for volunteers in the community. Content and services are provided in both official languages.
- The service was launched in 2004 and re-launched in 2009, with expanded content and features.
- Features:
 - *Ask a Professional* provides Canadians with direct access to health specialists online. More than 1,200 questions have been answered to date.
 - 62% of the questions are from patients, family or friends, and 36% are from health providers and volunteers seeking guidance on complex or difficult cases.
 - More than half of the questions are about a symptom of illness such as lack of appetite or confusion.
 - *Asked and Answered* is a collection of 80 key questions Canadians have posed through *Ask a Professional* and the responses, with all identifying information removed. This feature is very popular with families and patients, as well as health care providers, who use these Q&As to help frame difficult discussions.
 - The site offers more than 40 articles on a spectrum of issues, including symptom management, emotional health, caregiving, final days, accessing financial benefits and other topics to help families navigate through the health care system.
 - An interactive map helps people find local programs and services.
 - The *Glossary* provides plain-language definitions of medical and legal terms.
 - Listings include 800+ books, links and downloadable files.
 - More than 200 clinical tools for health care providers are available to support professional practice.
 - Information about the latest research findings is posted.
- Every month, up to 30,000 people visit virtualhospice.ca. People from 154 countries have accessed information on the site.
- Canadian Virtual Hospice operates with the support of the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and CancerCare Manitoba.