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**MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT INVESTS IN NURSING SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR  
HEPATITIS C PATIENTS**

*\$2.3-Million Investment Will Help 1,500 Patients A Year Complete Their Treatment*

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is helping people with hepatitis C get the nursing care and support they need to complete their treatment regimen and lead healthier and more active lives, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

“People with hepatitis C often find it difficult to stick to their treatments because of the side effects they suffer,” said Smitherman. “We want to provide patients with the nursing care and support they need to complete their treatment program and improve their chances of beating this disease.”

The government is providing \$2.3-million to hire up to 20 nurses who will provide support to approximately 1,500 patients a year in Ontario and ensure they follow their hepatitis C treatment plans. The funding includes salaries, administrative costs, ongoing program evaluation and nurse training. Nurses will help manage patients’ treatment – individualized services could include helping patients monitor their side effects and better cope with them through counselling. The nurse will consult with the treating physician who may decide to change the course of treatment depending on the type and severity of the side effects.

Treatment for hepatitis C lasts between 24 weeks and 48 weeks through a combination drug therapy of interferon and ribavirin. This treatment causes many side effects including severe depression, fatigue, mood swings and anemia. These side effects cause many patients to discontinue their treatment, potentially worsening their condition.

A provincial advisory committee will identify where nurses will be located based on hepatitis C statistics on rates of infection and identify local agencies that can best support additional care needs of people undergoing treatment for hepatitis C.

Studies have shown that up to 90 per cent of patients are able to complete their treatment with nursing support – compared to only 30 per cent who do so with no support. Successfully completed treatment can cure up to 60 per cent of patients with hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). The disease is spread through contact with the blood of an infected person. While some people with HCV may show no symptoms, others develop jaundice. Chronic hepatitis can lead to cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) which occurs in about 20 per cent of patients. In severe cases, this can lead to liver cancer or death.

An estimated 110,000 people in Ontario have hepatitis C and of those, 35,000 don't know they have the virus. Hepatitis C is a silent and potentially fatal disease that can show no signs or symptoms for years.

In 2006 the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care launched a province-wide public awareness

campaign encouraging individuals at risk to talk to their doctors and get tested for hepatitis C.

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities – keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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