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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS EVALUATION OF A NEW CANCER TREATMENT

Provides More Than \$5.1 Million To University Health Network To Conduct Evaluation

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is funding a two-year evaluation of photopheresis, a new cancer treatment that will benefit some bone marrow transplant patients or people with an advanced form of lymph node cancer, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

“Our government supports the study of new and emerging treatments, so we can be sure patients have access to innovative and safe care,” said Smitherman. “This evaluation will determine the best use of this treatment and how we can improve quality of life for this group of patients and increase access to services while staying close to home.”

Photopheresis will specifically benefit bone marrow transplant patients who have chronic graft-versus-host-disease and have not benefited from other treatments. It will also benefit patients with advanced treatment-resistant Cutaneous T Cell Lymphoma.

Based on recommendations from the Ontario Health Technology Advisory Committee that further study is needed on photopheresis, the government is providing the University Health Network (UHN) with more than \$5.1 million in funding to conduct a field evaluation. The hospital began accepting patients this month and it’s expected that approximately 50 patients will be treated each year.

“As the home of the largest stem cell transplant program in the province and a leading cancer centre, we’re pleased to be the site for this new and emerging treatment,” said Dr. Catherine Zahn, Executive Vice President of Clinical Programs and Practice, UHN. “Patients are expected to benefit by having photopheresis available in Ontario, and through the integration of photopheresis into our cancer and stem cell transplant programs.”

Under this treatment, a photopheresis machine withdraws a quantity of blood from a patient in a manner similar to dialysis. The machine separates the blood into red blood cells, white blood cells, and plasma. The white blood cells are treated with methoxsalen (a light-activated drug) and irradiated with ultraviolet light within the machine before being combined with the other native blood components and returned to the patient.

“For too long, this particular group of patients and their families have had to endure long trips to other provinces, such as Alberta, or to the United States for lifesaving therapy,” said Smitherman. “Making photopheresis treatment available in Ontario gives new hope to patients suffering from these life threatening complications.”

This is just the latest example of the McGuinty government's commitment to fighting cancer. Other initiatives include:

- Providing more than \$356 million in base and one-time funding for cancer drug treatments covered under the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's New Drug Funding Program since 2004/05
- Investing approximately \$16 million in new incremental chemotherapy and radiation treatment therapy funding in 2006/07
- Improving cancer care for women by investing in new technology and equipment for cervical screening.

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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Media Contacts:

David Spencer
Minister's Office
416-327-4320

A.G. Klei
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
416-314-6197

Members of the general public: 1-866-532-3161

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