



Canadians seeking end-of-life information turn to unique health website

Canadian Virtual Hospice expands professional support and resources

TORONTO, ON – March 2, 2009 – Every day, thousands of Canadians are given the devastating news that someone they care about is dying – yet many simply don't know where they can go for help. Now patients, families and health care providers can turn to an expanded Canadian Virtual Hospice website (www.virtualhospice.ca) to meet their needs.

“Supporting someone with a terminal illness offers some of life's most challenging experiences as well as some of life's most meaningful moments,” says Shelly Cory, Executive Director of the Canadian Virtual Hospice. “Canadians are coming to virtualhospice.ca because it's a place they can turn to for expert information and support.”

A four-year, \$2.4 million investment by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, Health Canada and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority enables the Canadian Virtual Hospice to offer new features and, at the same time, raise public awareness about the valuable information, support and resources available to Canadians at this online site.

“Caring for someone who is ill and nearing the end-of-life is an intensely personal experience. But along the way, we encounter similar challenges and have many of the same questions. Canadian Virtual Hospice provides not only valuable information, but also an ear and guiding hand in this difficult journey. The Canadian Partnership Against Cancer is proud to support the expansion of such an exceptional resource and service,” says Jessica Hill, CEO, Canadian Partnership Against Cancer.

Online access to health experts

One of the unique resources available on the site is *Ask a Professional*, which provides Canadians with direct online access to a team of experts in palliative and end-of-life care. The team of doctors and nurses has expanded to include a social worker and a spiritual care adviser.

“My elderly father was terminally ill but he didn't understand what was wrong with him – he would get depressed and ask me repeated questions because he either forgot or was in denial,” says Christine from Sudbury, Ontario. “I was searching for answers to try and help him when I found Canadian Virtual Hospice. I was able to ask a professional about how to speak with my dad about his illness. The advice I received was invaluable and helped both my dad and me through his final days.”

Every person who submits a question receives a detailed, personal and confidential response. By the end of 2008, Canadian Virtual Hospice had answered more than 800 questions from Canadians and received 30,000 visitors per month.

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In addition to *Ask a Professional*, visitors can find information on a range of palliative care topics as well as links to local resources and recommended books, websites and multimedia. The expanded site now offers new features:

- *Asked and Answered*, a collection of more than 80 questions asked by Canadians and the responses from the *Ask a Professional* team, with identifying information removed to protect confidentiality. Topics range from managing symptoms like pain and weight loss, to providing care at home, to financial assistance and talking with children about death;
- The *Glossary*, provides a list of accessible definitions for common palliative care terms;
- *The Exchange* offers Canadian researchers, clinicians and other leaders in palliative care the opportunity to share the latest research, best practices and innovations in peer reviewed articles; and
- *For Professionals* offers key resources and new tools for people working, volunteering and conducting research in palliative care.

“Virtual Hospice helps Canadians navigate the health system so that they are better equipped to advocate for themselves or their loved ones,” says Dr. Brian Postl, President and CEO of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. “We hope health care professionals will quickly recognize the value of this resource so they can recommend it as a trusted site for their patients and families.”

About Canadian Virtual Hospice

Canadian Virtual Hospice is a fully bilingual online resource staffed by experts in palliative care that provides information and personalized support to patients and families facing life-threatening illness and to the health providers who care for them. Virtual Hospice can be found at www.virtualhospice.ca and www.portailpalliatif.ca. Virtual Hospice operates with the support of the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and CancerCare Manitoba.

About the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer

The Canadian Partnership Against Cancer is an independent organization funded by the federal government to accelerate action on cancer control for all Canadians. It is bringing together cancer survivors, patients and families, cancer experts and government representatives to implement the first pan-Canadian cancer control strategy. The Partnership’s vision is to be a driving force to achieve a focused approach that will help prevent cancer, enhance the quality of life of those affected by cancer, lessen the likelihood of dying from cancer, and increase the efficiency of cancer control in Canada.

For more information, visit: www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca.

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