



# CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF GASTROENTEROLOGY L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DE GASTROENTÉROLOGIE

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Derek M. McKay, PhD

October 27, 2004

Dr. Michael Walker

Executive Director

Fraser Institute

4th Floor, 1770 Burrard Street

Vancouver, BC V6J 3G7

## RE: *Waiting Your Turn* Report and Gastroenterology Services in Canada

Dear Dr. Walker,

The Canadian Association of Gastroenterology (CAG) would like to commend you and the Fraser Institute for your initiative in studying and reporting on waiting times across Canada for the past fourteen years. The 2004 *Waiting Your Turn* Critical Issues Bulletin provides much-needed data to further define and ultimately address the problem of access to medical specialties in Canada.

The CAG is a not-for-profit organization of more than 1000 members – largely gastroenterologists – actively involved in research, physician education and patient care in gastrointestinal health and disease. Unbeknownst to many, digestive diseases are responsible for 15% of the total direct economic burden of Canadian health costs – a figure that exceeds the burden from mental, cardiovascular, respiratory or central nervous system diseases.<sup>1</sup> In addition, hospital discharges for digestive diseases contribute 12% of all hospitalizations, and 20% of all neoplasias.

The CAG shares your concern regarding excessive waiting times and has recently undertaken its Human Resource Planning Project comprised of three initiatives as outlined in the enclosed brochure. We invite you to review the brochure and, specifically, would like to draw your attention to our two wait time projects.

### Recording Actual Wait Times

Though data have not been formally collected, anecdotal reports suggest that waiting lists for non-urgent endoscopy range from several months to over a year in various parts of the country. Beginning next month the CAG will launch the Practice Audit in GastroEnterology (PAGE) program. This program provides our members with the educational opportunity of earning Category 5 maintenance of certification credits while recording how long Canadians wait to see a gastroenterologist. PAGE is an innovative program in which data are collected using a personal hand-held device for a one-week period. Data are subsequently downloaded to computer and transferred to a secure, central database. With use of a unique username and password, participants can view their own data and the aggregate (but not individual) data in real time. PAGE – *Access to Gastroenterology Services in Canada* will involve hundreds of gastroenterologists from across the country, with findings to be presented in late 2005.

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## Executive Director

Paul Sinclair, MSc

## Canadian Journal of Gastroenterology, Editor

L. R. Sutherland, MD

World Congress of Gastroenterology - September 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>, 2005 – Montréal, Quebec

**Recommendations on Appropriate Wait Times**

In January 2005, the CAG will hold a consensus conference involving key stakeholder groups (gastroenterologists, general surgeons, internists and family practitioners) to derive evidence- and expertise-based recommendations on appropriate wait times for gastroenterology services.

Actual wait time data will then be compared with the consensus recommendations to create a national map of access to services. In regions where waiting times are deemed unacceptable, the CAG will work with provincial gastroenterology associations and Ministries of Health to explore workable solutions. Such solutions may differ by region and involve new or alternate models for delivery of care.

Given our mutual interest in addressing waiting times, we would be very pleased to discuss this further with you if you feel that would be helpful. Certainly we would be very interested in facilitating the Institute's data collection – especially as it relates to digestive diseases. In addition, we would like to invite you to attend the ***Consensus Conference on Appropriate Wait Times for Gastroenterology Services*** as an observer. The Consensus Conference will be held all day Saturday January 15 and the morning of Sunday January 16<sup>th</sup> at the Holiday Inn on King Street in Toronto. Please note that travel and accommodation arrangements and expenses are the responsibility of the observer.

I look forward the chance to chat with you. Please feel free to contact me at my phone or fax number given on the letterhead or by email at: [dleddin@dal.ca](mailto:dleddin@dal.ca).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Desmond J. Leddin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Desmond J. Leddin, MB, FRCPC  
President, Canadian Association of Gastroenterology

<sup>1</sup> Beck IT. Disproportion of economic impact, research achievements and research support in digestive diseases in Canada. Clin Invest Med 2001;24:12-36.