



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF GASTROENTEROLOGY L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DE GASTROENTÉROLOGIE

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February 20, 2006

The Honourable Tony Clement
Minister of Health

Minister's Office - Health Canada
Brooke Claxton Building, Tunney's Pasture
Postal Locator: 0906C
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Dear Minister Clement,

The Canadian Association of Gastroenterology (CAG) is a professional organization of over 1000 members, largely gastroenterologists. The CAG strongly believes that a comprehensive approach to shortening health care wait times in Canada is needed, and looks forward to working with you towards this end surrounding your approach to a patient guarantee for all Canadians.

Since identification by the former Federal government of five priority areas (cancer treatment, heart surgery, MRIs, hip and joint replacements, and cataract surgery), and the subsequent creation of the Wait Time Alliance (WTA), the CAG has advocated for a broader approach to health care reform – specifically, one which does not exclude millions of Canadians suffering from diseases other than those in these five areas. We urged the federal and provincial governments to expand the wait time initiative to include all groups that are prepared to measure wait times and establish evidence-based guidelines on appropriate access to health care.

The CAG has completed both such initiatives. Last September, after months of work, the CAG released national data on wait times for access to gastroenterological (GI) care. In addition, following a multi-disciplinary consensus process the CAG released 24 wait-time benchmarks for appropriate care. By comparison, several of the professional organizations comprising the WTA failed to set their own targets by the December 2005 deadline set by the federal government. The CAG supplied these benchmarks to the federal and provincial governments and the WTA, and offered to work hand in hand with them. Disappointingly, this call to action produced no response from any of these parties.

The CAG is now exploring solutions to problems of access to GI specialists and procedures. For example, among our priorities is development of a much needed program for colon cancer screening – given that this is the third most common cancer in Canada and is largely preventable through early detection.

Honourable Minister, I trust that the above demonstrates the CAG's commitment to improving the quality of care and the access to care for all Canadians. We are excited to collaborate with your administration regarding your patient guarantee approach, and look forward to your response.

Des Leddin, MB, FRCPC
President, CAG

Cc: Prime Minister Harper

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