



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF GASTROENTEROLOGY L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DE GASTROENTÉROLOGIE

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September 9, 2005

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The Right Honourable Paul Martin, P.C., M.P., Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
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Dear Prime Minister,

The Canadian Association of Gastroenterology (CAG) wishes to bring an alarming situation to your attention, with the expectation that it will lead you to re-examine federal health wait time priorities to better reflect current realities. Digestive diseases represent **15% of the total direct economic burden** of Canadian health costs, yet our country's gastroenterology specialists are currently unable to meet best practice standards in the treatment of a majority of Canadian patients. This situation is cause for grave concern and merits your immediate attention.

At **\$1.14 billion per annum**, digestive diseases, including colon cancer, inflammatory bowel disease, irritable bowel syndrome, ulcers and cirrhosis, account for a greater lost of annual productivity than either mental, cardiovascular, respiratory and central nervous system diseases. Yet digestive diseases do not figure in your government's five-pronged wait list initiative. It is time that we set our priorities straight.

Canadians tell us that they are willing to wait 3 weeks, from initial consultation with their GP to consultation and testing by a specialist. As it stands, 25% of patients with alarm symptoms, indicators of disease such as cancer, wait 4 months. The lives of Canadians are at risk because of the inability of gastroenterology specialists to meet the demand. Solutions are urgently needed.

Representing over 550 gastroenterologists across Canada, the CAG has taken the initiative of implementing a *Wait Times Program* practice audit. Its results have allowed us to develop a list of 24 recommendations on medically-acceptable wait times for gastroenterology. We urge you to use these results, drawn from the data captured by nearly 200 Canadian GI specialists during 5,500 patient visits, to incorporate gastroenterology into the wait list initiative developed by your government.

The federal government's wait time initiative must be adapted in the face of current realities. The time to reprioritize is now.

We share a common goal, Mr Prime Minister. Our call to action goes beyond the simple infusion of federal dollars into the health care system. We propose a collaborative effort aimed at finding creative strategies which will reduce wait time. We look forward to working with you to effect change.

Sincerely,

Dr. Desmond J. Leddin, MB, FRCPC, MRCPI, MSc
President
Canadian Association of Gastroenterology (CAG)