



**CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF GASTROENTEROLOGY
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DE GASTROENTÉROLOGIE**

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Press Release

Attention News, Medical and Health Editors

For immediate distribution

ALBERTA HAS THE LONGEST WAIT TIMES IN CANADA FOR PATIENTS WITH DIGESTIVE DISEASE

Banff, Monday February 27, 2006 – Even in Alberta, one out of four Albertans referred to a Gastroenterologist must wait over 40 weeks before being seen and undergoing a procedure or test. This is one of the findings made by the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology (CAG) whose members were gathered in Banff, Alberta, for the 2006 Canadian Digestive Disease Week. “This problem is not only confined to Albertans, but all provinces struggle to deliver timely digestive disease health care”, says Dr. Desmond Leddin, president of the CAG.

Some 500 Canadian Gastroenterologists spent the week-end in Banff to discuss gastroenterology issues and to examine the conclusions reached by the *Gastroenterology Wait Times Program* practice audit. Close to 200 Canadian Gastroenterology specialists captured data on 5,500 patient visits over a six-month period. Wait times vary from one province to another and the results paint an alarming picture of access to digestive health care. For example:

- In New-Brunswick, 1 out of 4 patients waits more than 32 weeks from initial referral to procedure or test;
- In Ontario, average wait time is close to 16 weeks;
- In British Columbia, average wait time is just over 9 weeks;
- And in Quebec, average wait time is about 10 weeks.

The CAG also measured total wait times for people showing alarm symptoms which raise the possibility of diseases, such as cancer. The provinces with the longest wait time are:

- Ontario, where 1 out of 4 patients with alarm symptoms waits over 20 weeks from initial referral to procedure or test;
- British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec where 1 out of 4 patients waits over 16 weeks.

“These results don’t come close to meeting the medically acceptable wait time targets set by the CAG”, states Dr. Bill Paterson, President Elect of the CAG. “Canadian GI specialists have determined that patients referred with features highly suggestive of cancer should be seen and, if indicated, endoscoped within 2 weeks. In Canada, we meet this target in only 1/3 of patients. ”

The CAG is demanding that the 24 recommendations included in the *Canadian Consensus on Medically-Acceptable Wait Times for Digestive Health Care*, be implemented as wait time targets, and that federal and provincial government work together to provide a patient guarantee for all Canadians, including those with digestive disease.

About the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology

The Canadian Association of Gastroenterology (CAG) was founded in 1962 to promote the study of the digestive tract in health and disease. The CAG is the national body representing Gastroenterology in Canada and has key links with international bodies. Recently, the CAG hosted the World Congress of Gastroenterology (September 2005) in Montreal. The Association is built on broad principles and includes individuals of different disciplines (gastroenterologists, surgeons, paediatricians, radiologists, basic scientists, nurses, nutritionists, health care ethicists). Today, the Association is comprised of over 1,200 members. CAG members are actively involved in research, education and patient care in all areas of digestive health and disease, contributing to the economic and social health of all Canadians.

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Source:

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