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**Costly Miracle Cancer Drug Could Break the Bank**

*Cancer Treatment : New drug still being reviewed*

The Sault Star, By Frank Dubrovnik Montreal, QC, April 15, 2009

Jill Lang Ward considers herself lucky: should she ever need the most effective drug on the market to treat her cancer, her drug plan will cover most of it.

Health Canada approved Revlimid last fall as a treatment for multiple myeloma, a cancer of the plasma cells, or blood. However, it is still being reviewed by the Joint Oncology Drug Review, the body responsible for making funding recommendations to the provinces regarding oncology treatment.

Meanwhile, people are dying, warn advocates for publicly funding Revlimid, which comes in pill form, just as, for example, chemotherapy is covered.

Lang Ward, 56, knows one man in her support group who is foregoing Revlimid for chemo because it would cost him \$10,000 a month. "It would cause too much of a hardship for the family if he dipped into his savings to extend his life," says the Sault Ste. Marie woman.

Revlimid has been called a miracle drug, because, unlike chemo, "it not only treats the symptoms, it attacks the disease."

Lang Ward was diagnosed two years ago, some 10 years after her right knee started bothering her. She took a couple of spills a year apart "and broke both elbows," she says.

She had a knee replacement in February 2007 and soon began experiencing fatigue so extreme that she couldn't return to her job at the Great Lakes Forestry Centre. The cancer was at Stage 3 when they did a bone marrow biopsy in September. "They said at that point it was very likely I had it for 10 years."

Fortunately, checkups reveal little of the typical lesions and erosion on the bones that are a hallmark of myeloma. Lang Ward takes care of herself, staying active and taking an aquafit class four times a week. But she's no Pollyanna about her disease, which affects about 6,000 Canadians and is expected to kill 1,350. "It's always in the back of your mind."

A retired federal civil servant, she estimates that would cover 80 per cent of the cost of the drug. But nobody should have to choose between living or breaking the bank in a country where health care is ostensibly publicly funded, she says.

She has collected approximately 150 signatures and has spoken to Sault MPP David Oraziotti, who has promised to bring the petition to Queen's Park. "If it comes back, as it most likely will at some point, then I'd be considered for Revlimid. But not everybody has a drug plan."