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## **Sault Ste. Marie Woman Helps Get Cancer Drug Approved in Ontario**

The Sault Star, Sault Ste. Marie, ON, August 11, 2009

The efforts of a Sault Ste. Marie woman have helped get a life-saving cancer drug publicly covered.

Two weeks ago Ontario became the second province to approve funding for Revlimid, an oral drug that has proven effective for patients with the blood cancer multiple myeloma. The treatment, which can cost \$100,000 a year, will be available to both new patients and those who failed initial treatment.

"We thought it was only going to be for new patients, so this is wonderful news," said Jill Lang Ward, who collected nearly 750 signatures last spring to get Ontario's Health Ministry to cover Revlimid, which is generically known as lenalidomide.

"People would stop me in the grocery store or on the street and want to sign my petition," she said. "All our efforts made a difference."

The retired civil servant is covered for the drug but not everybody's in the same boat. In an April Sault Star article, she spoke movingly of a local man she knows who had to forego treatment because he couldn't afford it. The man was since able to get into a trial and is "doing remarkably well."

Lenalidomide is an update on thalidomide, infamous as a morning-sickness remedy that caused widespread birth defects in the 1950s and 1960s.

Multiple myeloma is a cancer of the bone marrow, in which abnormal plasma cells, called myeloma cells, grow uncontrollably and crowd out normal blood cells in the bone.

Some 2,000 Canadians are diagnosed each year.

British Columbia was the first province to cover the drug.

Earlier this year, Nova Scotia rejected coverage.

The news is good for myeloma patients in Ontario and B.C., but that will be cold comfort for everybody else in Canada, said John Lemieux, president of the advocacy group Myeloma Canada. "Denying access to this life-extending treatment affects patients' quality of life and life expectancy. For many, it will mean that, in the absence of other treatment alternatives, they will die sooner than will otherwise be the case. It is an unacceptable roadblock on the path to moving multiple myeloma from a fatal, incurable cancer to one that is treatable and survivable," said Lemieux in a release.