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Canadians Lack Confidence in Access to Cancer Medications

Myeloma Canada, Montreal, QC, February 25, 2009

Access to new treatments vital, as incidence of multiple myeloma continues to rise

If diagnosed with cancer today, nearly half of Canadians (43%) feel they would not have access to all the medications needed for treatment, according to a national survey conducted by Angus Reid. This lack of confidence is striking, considering that close to two thirds of those surveyed (64%) view cancer as something you can live with rather than die from.

Despite public opinion, however, access to new medications is not always provided for people suffering from rare diseases, such as multiple myeloma. There are a limited number of treatment options for people living with this progressive and fatal blood cancer - particularly for those with advanced stages of the disease.

"All patients have the right to the most effective treatment recommended by their doctor and Canadians living with multiple myeloma, especially those who are critically ill and who do not have time to wait," said Myeloma Canada President John Lemieux. "Immediate access to significant new therapies is essential to giving them a chance at life." added Lemieux.

Multiple myeloma is a rare cancer, but recent statistics indicate an increasing incidence and younger onset of the disease. 1, 2 Of the estimated 6,000 Canadians living with multiple myeloma, approximately 1,350 will die and 2,100 new patients will be diagnosed in Canada this year.2 Though the statistics are grim and myeloma is regarded as incurable, recent treatment advances continue to improve the prognosis of multiple myeloma, making it very treatable now.

"For patients whose disease has progressed on current or past treatments, new treatment options are crucial in order to help these patients survive – but there is no time to wait with this devastating disease," said Dr. Christine Chen, hematologist from Princess Margaret Hospital. "While new advances in the treatment of blood disorders, such as Revlimid, are helping patients live much longer and have a better quality of life, they are not widely accessible to patients in Canada."

The survey shows that most of the general public is unfamiliar with multiple myeloma. Only 15 per cent correctly identified multiple myeloma as a blood cancer. One third (33%) of Canadians surveyed mistakenly identified multiple myeloma as a type of skin cancer, while 36 per cent admitted to not knowing what it is. But this cancer is all too familiar to patients like Sheila Diprose of Calgary who was diagnosed with multiple myeloma in March of 2007.

"It took a while for the diagnosis to sink in. The biggest thing to accept is that they can't just cut it out of me and that it's something I have to live with for the rest of my life," said Sheila. "Revlimid gives me another hope to carry on; a sense of strength to keep me going. Instead of focusing on negative things, with this drug, I will have a chance at getting my life back."

About the *Time To Live* survey

The research was conducted by Angus Reid Strategies on behalf of Myeloma Canada from November 14 to 16, 2008. Data was collected via an online survey among 1002 randomly selected Canadian adults who are Angus Reid Forum panelists. The margin of error which measures sampling variability is +/- 3.1%, 19 times out of 20. The results have been statistically weighted according to the most current education, age, gender and region from Census data to ensure a sample representative of the entire adult population of Canada. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

About multiple myeloma

Myeloma, also called multiple myeloma, is an incurable but treatable cancer of cells in the bone marrow. It affects the production of red cells, white cells and plasma cells, which develop into antibodies meant to help fight infections. The disease may cause damage to bone structure, resulting in frequent fractures. It can cause severe fatigue, recurrent infections and bone pain. It may also prevent organs and nerves from working properly. It affects an estimated 750,000 people worldwide, and in industrialized countries it is being diagnosed in growing numbers and in increasingly younger people.

Myeloma Canada

Myeloma Canada, a non-profit organization, with registered charity status dedicated to supporting people living with multiple myeloma is the only national organization exclusively devoted to serving the Canadian myeloma community. The mission of Myeloma Canada is to: provide educational resources and support to patients, families, and caregivers; increase awareness of the disease; and promote improved access to new therapies, treatment options, and health care resources. Myeloma Canada works with regional support groups and key myeloma experts to strengthen the voice of the Canadian myeloma community. Myeloma Canada works in close affiliation with the International Myeloma Foundation, the world's oldest and largest myeloma organization. For more information or to find out how you can help please visit our website at www.myelomacanada.ca.

References:

1 National Cancer Institute. A snapshot of Myeloma. Available at: <http://planning.cancer.gov/disease/Myeloma-Snapshot.pdf> Accessed February 17, 2009.

2 Myeloma Canada: Cause and Incidence; http://www.myelomacanada.ca/en/incidence_prevalence.htm?t=1 Accessed February 17, 2009.