

PATIENT-LED ALLIANCE MOVES ARTHRITIS STANDARDS FORWARD

Summit sets out national, actionable standards in nine key areas

OTTAWA (November 3, 2005) – Exhorted by 11-year old Logan Graham, who has had rheumatoid arthritis since he was four, delegates at the *Summit on Standards for Arthritis Prevention and Care* vowed to press forward in their effort to establish consistent, effective, equitable access to arthritis care and information across Canada.

The Summit produced a total of 15 specific standards in nine key areas, which will now be refined and presented to government for action.

In an emotional finale to the two-day Summit, Graham told the 200 delegates, “Good standards of care are a good first step,” adding that arthritis standards need to be taken to new levels.

“Let’s rock this joint!” he concluded, echoing the theme of the event.

Graham was among more than 50 people with arthritis participating in the Summit, offering first-hand views on what needs to be done to improve care for the more than 4 million Canadians dealing with the chronic disease. Other delegates included formal and informal care givers, health care providers, government (federal and provincial/territorial) representatives, arthritis researchers and clinicians, voluntary associations and representatives from the pharmaceutical industry.

“Arthritis is everywhere. Every Canadian is at risk, or has it. It’s time we had standards in place to ensure that everyone across the country has the same access to the right information and the right care,” said Summit co-chair Cheryl Koehn, a 16-year survivor of rheumatoid arthritis from British Columbia.

Recommended standards were put forward in nine key areas: Physical Activity, Injury Prevention, Access to a Diagnosis, Access to Medications, Access to Surgery, Manpower and Models of Care, Participation, General Public and Consumer Awareness, and Medical/Health Professionals Education and Awareness.

The Summit included workshops to ensure that the standards are based on solid scientific evidence, and to develop realistic implementation strategies to move them forward.

“This is the beginning of a national arthritis strategy – led by patients. They’re the ones who know what is needed and they are making their voices heard,” said Summit co-chair Dr. Gillian Hawker, a rheumatologist/researcher at the University of Toronto.

Examples of specific standards include:

- “Every Canadian with Inflammatory Arthritis must be identified and treated appropriately within four weeks of seeing a health care professional.”
- “Every Canadian requiring total joint replacement surgery should have this performed within six months.”
- “Canadians with arthritis must have timely and equal access to appropriate medications.”

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Other themes emerging from the Summit included the need for a national catastrophic drug program, to ensure that the latest and best arthritis medications are accessible in every province.

Representatives from the Government of Canada, including Minister of State (Public Health) Carolyn Bennett and Minister of State (Sport) Stephen Owen – who both addressed the Summit – congratulated the delegates on their work and expressed keen interest in the outcomes.

“The Ministers made it clear that the government is looking for solutions, that are realistic and can be acted upon, and that is what this Summit has produced,” said Summit co-chair Dr. Dianne Mosher, a rheumatologist/researcher at Dalhousie University.

The Alliance for the Canadian Arthritis Program (ACAP), an umbrella group with membership from a wide cross-section of arthritis stakeholders, organized the Summit, and is committed to following through on its recommendations.

For additional information, please visit the ACAP website at arthritisalliance.com.

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