



NEWS RELEASE

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Pharmacist and Patient Access to Medical Records will Improve Healthcare in Sault Ste. Marie

Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, August 9, 2006 – Canada Health Infoway Inc. (Infoway), Group Health Centre (GHC) and the Ontario Pharmacists' Association (OPA) launched a new \$3.5-million initiative today which will help reduce medication errors and provide better patient care in Sault Ste. Marie by allowing pharmacists to have access to clinical information about patients electronically.

Through the Group Health Centre's Electronic Medical Record, healthcare providers will share information about patients with pharmacists. The Electronic Medical Record, established several years ago, has already been valuable in sharing information amongst healthcare providers and will now be extended to include pharmacists, in an initiative called EMRxtra. The information will be shared in a secure manner and will require patient consent.

"This project demonstrates how technology facilitates the rapid exchange of information," said federal Health Minister Tony Clement. "Our investments in Canada Health Infoway are harnessing the power of information technology to increase productivity, enhance safety, improve information sharing, and deliver better, more timely access to care for all Canadians, no matter where they live."

"We're pleased to help support this initiative which will not only help to improve the quality of care for patients of the Group Health Centre, but can also serve as a model for improving healthcare in Canada," said Richard Alvarez, *Infoway's* President and CEO. Infoway is investing \$2 million in EMRxtra.

"The Group Health Centre is a well-known leader and pioneer in primary care delivery and in the utilization of technology by a multidisciplinary team. This innovative program will allow us to expand our existing circle of care to integrate pharmacists into our programs," said Group Health Centre's Interim COO Teresa D'Angelo.

With the permission of participating patients, pharmacists will be able to access patient drug profiles, current lab test results; clinical intent of prescribed medications and the patient's care plan.

Over 20 pharmacies will participate in EMRxtra, which includes 40 to 50 pharmacists. The project will first be used with a pilot group of several hundred patients and then be extended to all GHC 60,000 patients.

Pharmacists, who are considered to be trusted and accessible health care providers in the community, provide a significant contribution to primary care delivery particularly in the area of chronic disease and medication management. Studies have shown that pharmacist interventions in collaboration with physicians are very effective in cases of patients with chronic diseases.

"The addition of pharmacists is a natural and long overdue component of the circle of care. This program will enable me to make better use of the expertise provided by pharmacists, make more efficient use of my time and hopefully provide a more convenient and

effective patient experience," said Dr. Lewis O'Brien, Family Physician, Algoma District Medical Group, Physician Lead, EMRxtra Project.

"With access to an electronic system, pharmacists in Sault Ste. Marie will be able to fully collaborate with physicians and the rest of the provider team and resolve drug related issues more effectively and efficiently for their patients," said Marc Kealey, CEO of the Ontario Pharmacists' Association.

This initiative will also provide patients with greater access to their individual Electronic Medical Record which includes a record of diagnoses and treatment, including medications. A personalized web-accessible patient record tool will enhance engagement of patients in the self-management and decision-making process.

ABOUT THE PARTNERS:

Infoway is an independent not-for-profit organization that invests with public sector partners across Canada to implement and reuse compatible health information systems which support a safer, more efficient healthcare system. These systems provide healthcare professionals with rapid access to complete and accurate patient information, enabling better decisions about treatment and diagnosis. The result is a sustainable, healthcare system offering improved quality, accessibility and productivity.

Group Health Centre (GHC) is a multidisciplinary, not-for-profit, community-based health organization serving over 60,000 primary care patients in Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma District. GHC's vision is to provide leadership and achieve excellence in healthcare and wellness promotion in an atmosphere of caring and respect for the individual. GHC is one of the most technologically advanced physician group practices (The Algoma District Medical Group) in Canada with an electronic medical record (EMR) system implemented since 1997 and is considered as a primary care model across Canada. With the exception of the pharmacist, GHC's multidisciplinary team is very comprehensive, including physicians, nurse practitioners, physiotherapists, chiropractors, dietitians, optometrists, audiologists and others.

The Ontario Pharmacists' Association is the professional advocacy association representing the views and interests of over 10,000 practicing pharmacists and pharmacists-in-training, in Canada's largest province. OPA advocates for the quality care and well being of Ontarians. OPA recognizes the transformation agenda of Ontario and endorses the effective use of information technology as one of the key strategies to support integration, collaboration and professional services. It has also been an active promoter of EHR solutions and has been involved in various e-Health initiatives – Ontario Health Informatics Standards Council (OHISC), Client Registry and Information Management (CRIM), Secured Messaging Project from Smart Systems for Health Agency (SSHA) and others.

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For more information:

Cindy Hoffman, Director, Corporate Communications
Canada Health Infoway
Telephone: 514-397-7335 or 1-866-868-0550
Cell: 514-606-7335

Elizabeth Bodnar, Senior Manager, Corporate Relations
Group Health Centre
Telephone: 705-759-5529 Cell: 705-542-9835

Mary-Anne Cedrone, Manager of Communications
Ontario Pharmacists' Association
Telephone: 416-441-0788 ext. 4266 Cell: 416-278-5582