



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Chemo-in-the-home -- Helping cancer patients in Ontario

Toronto, ON – A little known program is making a big difference for cancer patients in Ontario.

Unthinkable a decade ago, more than 300 people a year in the province are now receiving chemotherapy in their homes. They are able to spend more time with their families, avoid the difficulties of travel, be treated in comfortable and familiar surroundings, and have a better quality of life.

"It's been a blessing," says Duncan Rennie, currently receiving chemotherapy for chronic myloid leukemia. "When I'm treated at home, the nurse is in and out of here in about an hour. There's less disruption. Less travel. And that's a big consideration when you're not feeling very well."

This breakthrough has been made possible by Saint Elizabeth Health Care and its dedicated team of nurse specialists. Saint Elizabeth pioneered the "chemo-in-the-home" program, and today it provides this service to more than 80 per cent of all Ontario patients receiving chemotherapy outside hospitals and cancer clinics.

Started as a pilot project in 1991 by Saint Elizabeth, the Home Care Program for Metropolitan Toronto and the Toronto Bayview Regional Cancer Centre, it was the first such program in Canada.

The illnesses most often treated through the home chemotherapy program are gastro-intestinal cancer, leukemia and myeloma (cancer typically found in bone marrow and lymph nodes).

Chemo-in-the-home is also provided to palliative care patients. In addition, Saint Elizabeth is providing home chemotherapy to children with leukemia in a study being carried out by the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.

The 10 nurse specialists at Saint Elizabeth who deliver "chemo-in-the-home" are responsible for assessing blood tests, administering the drugs, monitoring for adverse reactions, consulting with oncologists and other health care team members, and counseling, supporting and educating patients and their families.

"We expect this program to expand significantly in the years ahead," says Shirlee Sharkey, President and CEO of Saint Elizabeth. Some of the reasons for the expected increase are: an aging population, already-busy regional cancer centres, changing consumer expectations and patient choice.

Since home chemotherapy is not taught at the basic nursing level, Saint Elizabeth has responded by developing a training and certification program. To qualify, candidates must be registered nurses with a background in oncology, IV therapy and community health, and have excellent assessment and communication skills. Their training includes classroom instruction, self-study, and home visits under the supervision of an experienced chemotherapy nurse.

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Saint Elizabeth is not paid any more for these services than what it receives for standard nursing care in the home. "We have put a tremendous amount of time and effort into this program because, quite simply, it is the right thing to do. It makes a big difference in the lives of many seriously-ill people," Sharkey notes.

Joan and Paul Satran explain what the program has meant for them and their two children. Joan is currently receiving chemotherapy for multiple myeloma. "Being able to stay in my home and sleep in my own bed has been tremendously positive for me," she says. Paul adds that "it has allowed us to have more time together as a family."

Founded in 1908, Saint Elizabeth is a leading charitable, not-for-profit home care organization. It provides the full range of in-home services including nursing, rehabilitation, homemaking and personal support.

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