

News release

Dramatic rise in workplace stress and related illness among Canadian health benefit plan members –

The Aventis Healthcare Survey

Employees making the connection between stress and chronic disease

Montreal, Quebec, May 2, 2001 – This year's edition of *The Aventis Healthcare Survey*, conducted by Ipsos-Reid and released today, suggests that Canadians with employer-sponsored health benefit plans are experiencing significantly more stress in the workplace than only a year ago, and that illness related to job stress is on the rise.

Up an astonishing 15 percentage points since February 2000, slightly more than six in 10 (62%) respondents in the survey, sponsored by Aventis Pharma Inc., report that they are experiencing "a great deal of stress" on the job. At the same time, up nine points from last year, 34 per cent of Canadians with health benefit plans agree with the statement: "Workplace stress has been so overwhelming that it has made me physically ill at times." In fact, those who say they are experiencing a great deal of stress at work are five times more likely to say that they have been physically ill because of stress.

In a related finding of *The Aventis Healthcare Survey*, 31 per cent of those who report illness related to workplace stress also say they have taken six or more days off work in the last year, versus only 12 per cent of those who do not report being ill as a result of workplace stress. Forty-one per cent, equal to last year's finding, say their employer does not do nearly enough to help them manage stress at work.

"The results of *The Aventis Healthcare Survey* sound the alarm about growing stress on the job and its very real effects on the health of our workforce," said Jean-François Leprince, President of Aventis Pharma Inc. "Employers who want to avoid the escalating costs of workplace stress and its associated illnesses and absenteeism have a higher stake than ever in helping their staff deal with the effects of the quickening pace and increasing pressures of life at work and home."

"There is no doubt that employees today are more health conscious, better informed about the causes of illness and more aware of research confirming the link between stress and health," said Dr. Dominique Garrel, endocrinologist at the Hôtel Dieu Hospital in Montreal. "They value their work highly, but they are also insisting that their concerns about leading a balanced, fulfilling, healthy life be addressed by the employer."

-more-

News release

-2-

Employees more likely to link stress to cancer and heart disease than to diabetes

Answers to a new series of questions assessing respondents' knowledge of risk factors, preventive measures and symptoms for heart disease, cancer and diabetes suggest that employees have a reasonably good understanding of the role of stress reduction, in tandem with a healthy diet, exercise and weight control, in preventing chronic disease.

But while experts including the Canadian Diabetes Association increasingly recognize a stress/diabetes link, survey respondents did not make this connection as clearly as for the other two diseases. All respondents are more likely to identify stress as a risk factor ("contributing circumstance or behaviour") for heart disease (30%) and for cancer (16%) than for diabetes (5%). Similarly, respondents are more likely to identify stress reduction as a preventive measure for heart disease (20%) and for cancer (10%) than for diabetes (4%).

"Stress, in tandem with other lifestyle factors such as diet, weight and exercise, does play an important role in developing adult-onset diabetes," said Dr. Garrel. "Stress reduction must be part of an effective strategy to prevent or delay the onset of diabetes and its complications, and is key to managing the disease and ensuring the best quality of life possible for sufferers."

Diabetes is one of the leading causes of death by disease in Canada. It is estimated that 750,000 Canadians are unaware they have the disease. Diabetes and its complications are the most common reason for patients to make use of the healthcare system, and the disease costs at least \$9 billion annually in healthcare, days off and lost productivity.

"A key message for employers from *The Aventis Healthcare Survey* is that we need to do a better job of educating our employees about the link between stress and chronic disease," said Leprince. "It is vital to put in place the policies and programs that will help combat stress and prevent its related illnesses which are posing a major threat to public health in the new millennium."

Concern over future access to healthcare high

Among other key findings of *The Aventis Healthcare Survey* is that prescription drug coverage continues to be highly valued by employees. Given the choice of having only one health benefit, 60 per cent – up five per cent from 2000 – agree that they would choose their prescription drug coverage over all others.

-more-

News release

-3-

And, once again this year, a majority of Canadians with health insurance coverage through work express satisfaction with the public healthcare system. However, a new question in *The Aventis Healthcare Survey* reveals that almost half (46%) fear the system will get worse over the next few years. Top concerns in this regard include access to medical care and facilities (38%), a shortage of doctors and nurses (32%), and delays and waiting lists (23%).

“This fourth annual edition of *The Aventis Healthcare Survey* demonstrates once again our commitment to leading-edge research dedicated to helping Canadian employers provide effective, responsive and proactive health benefit plans that meet the needs of employees and their families,” said Leprince.

Health benefit plans seen as meeting the needs of employees

The Aventis Healthcare Survey reveals that two thirds (66%) of Canadians with employer-sponsored health insurance feel that their benefit plan meets their needs either “very well” (48%) or “extremely well” (18%). One quarter (23%) of respondents believe that their plan has improved over the last five years. Since 1999, assuming a cost-increase scenario, willingness to pay higher premiums has increased six percentage points while, at the same time, willingness to pay a higher portion of the cost of using specific medical services has decreased by seven points.

Some employer-sponsored wellness initiatives and disease prevention strategies were identified as top priorities for benefit plans in the future. These include smoking cessation programs, exercise programs, coverage for cutting-edge drugs, yearly in-house clinics to screen for diseases and weight-loss programs.

“This year’s results demonstrate that employees are looking increasingly to employers for information, strategies and support in dealing with chronic disease and stress-related illness in the workplace,” said Leprince.

Aventis Pharma Inc. is the Canadian pharmaceutical business of Aventis S.A., a world leader in pharmaceuticals and agriculture. Aventis Pharma is dedicated to treating and preventing human disease through the discovery, development, manufacture and sale of innovative pharmaceutical products aimed at satisfying unmet medical needs. The corporate headquarters of Aventis Pharma is in Frankfurt, Germany. The Canadian operation employs over 700 people and is headquartered in Laval, Quebec.

- more -

News release

-4-

Ipsos-Reid conducted *The Aventis Healthcare Survey* through telephone interviews among a random sample of 1,500 Canadians 18 years of age and older, between Jan. 9 and Jan. 28, 2001. All respondents are primary employer-sponsored health benefit plan holders. With a sample of this size, one can say with 95 per cent certainty that the results of the survey are within ± 2.5 percentage points of what they would have been if the entire target population had been polled.

-30-

For further information, please contact:

Michel G. Tremblay
Director of Public Relations
Aventis Pharma
(514) 956-4098

Daniel Despins
BDDS Shandwick
(514) 393-1180