

Despite Canadians' growing knowledge, diabetes epidemic soars

- Knowledge gaps put many at risk -

Montreal, Quebec: May 7, 2002 – Even though Canadian health benefit plan members display a fairly good knowledge of diabetes, this year's edition of *The Aventis Healthcare Survey* reveals that many Canadians are ill-prepared to deal with the diabetes epidemic. According to the Canadian Diabetes Association (CDA), more than two million Canadians, including 500,000 Quebecers, have the disease. A third of these people are unaware of their life-threatening condition.

Diabetes is a leading cause of death by disease in Canada, yet 60 per cent of survey respondents are unaware of this fact. Health Canada reports that diabetes claims 5,000 lives per year and contributes to a total death toll of 25,000 Canadians annually. These numbers are on the rise according to the CDA, which predicts that another million Canadians will join the ranks of diabetics by 2010. Nevertheless, more than one-third (36%) of the survey's respondents do not realize that diabetes is reaching epidemic proportions.

"The diabetes epidemic is here. I see it in my clinic every day," said Dr. Dominique Garrel, endocrinologist at the CHUM and Director of the Department of Nutrition at the Université de Montréal. "The fact that people are becoming more knowledgeable is good, but taking action in terms of prevention and earlier treatment is even more important. People have to stop thinking of diabetes in an abstract context and act on the reality that diabetes may affect them personally."

Despite an accelerating diabetes epidemic, the number of Canadians interested in receiving information about diabetes remains the same today as five years ago (63%). Conducted by Ipsos-Reid among a national sample of 1,500 Canadian employees with a health benefit plan, *The Aventis Healthcare Survey* also uncovered many gaps in respondents' knowledge of their own risk of developing the disease.

"The severity of the disease is considerably underrated, which points to the need for more education to help Canadians take better control over their own health," said Jean-François Leprince, President of Aventis Pharma Inc. "And what is equally alarming is that the majority of diabetics will develop heart disease."

Close to one-third (31%) of survey respondents were unaware that heart disease is a leading complication of diabetes. Also, one in three (34%) respondents did not know that many diabetics have high blood pressure, and incorrectly believed that eating sugar can lead to diabetes (34%). Furthermore, one in five (20%) were unaware that diabetes is a major cause of adult blindness and erectile dysfunction. Even though diabetes is both a chronic and incurable disease, one in six (16%) respondents believed insulin was a cure.

"While three-quarters of respondents say they have a good understanding of the disease, associations such as the CDA and companies such as Aventis must continue their efforts to educate the public on diabetes prevention, dispel myths surrounding the disease, and encourage action. It is time for the public health establishment to mobilize itself in the fight against diabetes as it did in the fight against tobacco," Dr. Garrel added.

Diabetes and its complications account for the most usage of the Canadian healthcare system. Each year, some \$9 billion is spent on diabetes care and indirect costs such as days off work and lost productivity. Type 2 diabetes, commonly referred to as adult-onset diabetes, is the most prevalent type of diabetes, particularly amongst older Canadians. Yet, 28% of survey respondents did not know that being over 45 years of age is a risk factor for the disease.

“As more Canadians are diagnosed with diabetes, there will definitely be an impact on both the public and the private healthcare system,” said Leprince. “If we don’t step up our collective efforts on education, prevention and earlier treatment, the health and economic consequences going forward will be formidable.”

Concern about health and economic costs of diabetes comes at a time when Canadians are increasingly worried about the future of the healthcare system

The Aventis Healthcare Survey also indicates that over half (55%) of health benefit plan members anticipate a deterioration in their provincial healthcare services over the next few years, compared to only one in six respondents (16%) who say it will improve in the same time period. Those who believed the healthcare system will worsen cited staff shortages (35%), delays/waiting lists (32%), and access to medical care/facilities (25%) as the top reasons for their pessimism.

Respondents, however, now appreciate the individual components of their employer-sponsored health benefits plan more so than they did in 1999. Fifty-seven per cent indicate they would be willing to pay higher premiums to maintain their current level of coverage – an increase of seven points over 1999 – if their employer was unwilling or unable to pay the associated increases. Over half the respondents (53%) also indicated they would be willing to pay higher premiums if their plan covered elderly family members.

In response to a new series of questions dealing with the growing responsibility for eldercare in Canada, one-third (32%) of respondents indicated they are currently personally responsible for taking care of elderly family members, which includes tasks such as driving to doctors’ appointments and making arrangements for medical services. On average, these Canadians spend over 23 hours each month on eldercare. The survey also revealed that one in five Canadians (17%) with a health benefit plan expect to take more time off work to care for elderly family members within the next two years.

“With each passing year, *The Aventis Healthcare Survey* places the spotlight on emerging trends such as new workplace realities and the changing face of our healthcare system,” concluded Leprince. “Our goal has always been to project ahead so that our partners are better equipped to make decisions concerning the healthcare needs of Canadians.”

Ipsos-Reid surveyed Canadians 18 years of age and older through telephone interviews conducted between Jan. 7 and Jan. 19, 2002. All respondents are primary employer-sponsored health benefit plan holders. With a sample size of 1,500, the overall results are within ± 2.5 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire target population been polled.

Aventis Pharma Inc., the Canadian pharmaceutical business of Aventis S.A., employs close to 800 people and has its headquarters in Laval, Quebec.

Aventis (NYSE: AVE) is dedicated to improving life by treating and preventing human disease through the discovery and development of innovative pharmaceutical products. Aventis focuses on prescription drugs for important therapeutic areas such as oncology, cardiology, diabetes

and respiratory disorders as well as on human vaccines. The company's global headquarters are located in Strasbourg, France.

– 30 –

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