

H & K Communications

72 Elvaston Avenue
Nepean, Ontario
K2G 3X9

Phone: (613) 829-1800
Fax: (613) 829-2449
E-mail: hturkow@rogers.com

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**PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH AND SCRUM AT HOSPITAL FOR
SICK CHILDREN**

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Phone (613) 829-1800 Fax (613) 829-6181 E-mail hturkow@home.com

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MARY JO HADDAD (President, CEO, Toronto Hospital for Sick Children): Welcome everyone. My name's Mary Jo Haddad. I'm President and CEO here at Sick Kids' and I'd like to welcome all of you here today. This morning I would especially like to welcome our distinguished guests, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and federal Minister Tony Clement. On behalf of the children and families and the staff at Sick Kids', I welcome both of you.

Today is the beginning of a new vision, a shared vision for improving children's health in Canada. As the President and CEO of Sick Kids', I can tell you with certainty that the best way to secure a healthy population and a prosperous future for Canada is to invest in our children today. Sick children, after all, if not healed properly, become sick adults, often with far more complicated and costly problems. This is the time to strengthen the children's healthcare system and our federal government is doing just that. I am now honoured to introduce the Prime Minister of Canada. Please welcome the Right Honourable Stephen Harper. (APPLAUSE)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Well, thank you very much everyone. Bonjour mesdames et messieurs. Good morning. Je suis très heureux de me trouver à l'hôpital pour enfants à Toronto dans le but d'annoncer le lancement d'une très importante initiative en matière de soins de santé.

It gives me great pleasure to be here, to be back here at the Hospital for Sick Children, to announce a very important healthcare initiative. Now, before I begin, I'd like to just stake a moment to acknowledge some of the special people who are up at the front here today, of course

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President and CEO here at Sick Kids', Mary Jo Haddad, you already met. Give her a hand, though. (APPLAUSE) The hospital's surgeon-in-chief, Dr. James Wright. (APPLAUSE) Chief of surgery at British Columbia's children's hospital, Dr. Jeffrey Blair. (APPLAUSE) The CEO of the Canadian Association of Paediatric Health Centre, Elaine Orrbine...I've got to say that right. (APPLAUSE) And Cathy Seguin, the Vice President of Sick Kids' International. (APPLAUSE) Each of these individuals has played a role in developing the project I'm announcing today, as did our Health Minister, Tony Clement, who has been working very hard on this over the past year. I'd also like to recognize and thank my colleague, Member of Parliament for Burlington, Mike Wallace, for joining us here as well. Finally...go ahead. I heard some applause there. (APPLAUSE) Finally, I'd like to thank Sick Kids', Sick Children's Hospital for hosting us today. This is truly one of Canada's finest healthcare institutions. It's a world renowned facility that has been on the cutting edge of paediatric medicine since its founding in 1875. Countless numbers of Canadians who benefited from the expertise and the compassion of those people who work within these walls. Indeed, I was one of those beneficiaries myself on more than one occasion when I was a child. But now as a parent, I understand there's nothing more heart wrenching than seeing a child suffer, and because their lives are so precious, because they are our future, our children deserve the best medical care possible delivered as promptly as possible. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of our medical professionals, many children do not receive the care they need in a timely manner. Too often they hear the words that haunt the entire Canadian healthcare system, "Sorry, you'll just have to wait."

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Par conséquent, les enfants et leurs parents peuvent se retrouver dans les listes d'attente pendant des semaines, même des mois, ce qui peut aggraver leur état, prolonger leur souffrance et parfois finir en tragédie.

This is simply unacceptable. Our children deserve better, and Canada's new government is determined to do better, because everywhere I went during the last election, I heard the same concerns: wait times are too long, we're afraid those we love won't be able to get the care they need when they need it. Now, while the problem cannot be fixed overnight, it can be improved step by step over time. This is precisely what our government has begun to do, and in less than a year, we're well on our way.

Aujourd'hui j'annonce que notre gouvernement réalise un autre progrès en finançant un projet pilote de garantie de délais d'attente en pédiatrie.

That's why today I'm announcing that our government is taking another step forward by funding a paediatric wait time guarantee pilot project. Under this 15-month pilot project, the first ever pan-Canadian wait times information system for children will be developed. The system will assemble accurate data about six key surgical areas. The next stage of the project will be to develop a treatment plan for children facing unacceptable wait times. Ultimate today's initiative will lead to a surgical wait time guarantee for all children. There are 16 first-rate children's hospitals in cities across this country. As any parent who's been to any one of these facilities can attest, the quality of care is second to none. But sometimes even their best isn't good enough. Today's announcement is about providing these children's hospitals with the tools they need to deliver even better care, because better care means timelier care. As I said, improving access to medically necessary

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services is a long-standing commitment of our government, and today's announcement is the fourth patient wait-times guarantee pilot project we've introduced since taking office.

En moins d'un an, le ministre Clement a réalisé des progrès considérables. Ses collaborateurs et lui-même travaillent avec les provinces, les territoires, les professionnels de la santé, et d'autres intervenants afin de faire en sorte que l'ensemble de la population reçoivent les traitements dont ils ont besoin dans des délais cliniquement acceptables.

In less than a year, Minister Clement has made considerable progress. He and his department are working with provinces, territories, healthcare professionals and other stakeholders to ensure that all Canadians receive treatment within clinically acceptable wait times. In February, Minister Clement will be hosting a conference with his provincial and territorial colleagues to showcase our progress so far. I'm pleased to say that all governments are pulling in the same direction. They all share our commitment to shortening wait times, because the health and well-being of Canadians depends on our success. Thank you, merci beaucoup, and we will take your questions in just a minute.

MARY JO HADDAD: Thank you, Prime Minister. On behalf of the Hospital for Sick Children and all paediatric hospitals across the country, we're delighted to see that children are being included in a national healthcare agenda, and we commend you and your government for addressing the issues that were highlighted in Dr. Postl's recent report on wait times. We believe that creating a national wait times strategy for children is the best way of ensuring that our children get the timely medical care they need when they need it. It's only through collaboration across all levels of government, and

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with healthcare leaders, that we will see better outcomes for our kids. In Ontario, we're very pleased with the progress that we've been making. Dr. Jim Wright, our surgeon-in-chief, and Elaine Orrbine, the Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Paediatric Health Centres, who are with us today, look forward to working with the paediatric surgical chiefs across this country to focus on the priorities and the solutions in the children's health agenda. Today we will create a system that not only enhances access to surgical care for Canada's children, but also improve health outcomes for the next generation. On behalf of the children across Canada and those who provide special care to them, I want to thank you, Prime Minister for this very momentous announcement today. (APPLAUSE)

DIMITRI SOUDAS (Prime Minister's Press Secretary):
So we'll start with Angie Seth, Omni Television.

REPORTER: I wanted to ask you a quick question actually with regards to Wajid Khan. We know you're going to Mississauga and you're going to be meeting with him there. What exactly is his role going to be now with the Conservative government? Is he going to be playing a role with Afghanistan?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: He's going to remain special advisor to me on...excuse me, we're getting an echo there. He's going to remain special advisor to me on the Middle East and Central Asian affairs. He will be taking some more trips, further fact-finding missions to that region, and he will also sit on the Foreign Affairs committee on behalf of the Conservative Party.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with Shawn Mullin, Global Television. Right over here.

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REPORTER: Prime Minister, can't help but notice that there are no provincial representatives here in an area that is clearly provincial responsibility. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs Ontario, (inaudible) has been quoted as saying she's unimpressed at the amount of money involved in this. I guess the question is why are you doing a project like this that is so clearly in provincial jurisdiction? Are you trying to send some kind of message that you don't think they're moving fast enough, or surely this is some kind of provocation?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, first of all, I don't accept that categorization. The federal government, this is a...this is really a project of research and information creating, systems information. This is an area the federal government has been involved in, and in fact the provinces have encouraged in the past our involvement in this particular area. I should say that the project...sorry, I should say that the project in question today was actually put together by the 16 paediatric hospitals themselves. This is really their initiative. What the federal government is announcing today is its support for that initiative. I don't purport to speak for the network, but I'm sure I can say without much risk that if the Province of Ontario also wanted to participate, they would welcome that participation.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: On va continuer avec Daniel Thibeault, Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE: M. Harper, la compagnie Bell Helicopter a réaffecté une trentaine d'employés hier à cause d'une clause du département d'état américain qui demande d'éviter à ce que certains employés à double citoyenneté au Canada travaillent sur les contrats reliés à la défense aux États-Unis. Votre gouvernement semble pas être...semble pas vouloir

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faire ça avec les fonctionnaires dans ces situations-là. Qu'est-ce que vous pensez de la situation, de ce qui a été fait par Bell. Qu'est-ce que vous pouvez faire de ce côté-là? Est-ce qu'il y a moyen d'obtenir une dispense, là, du côté...?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Nous avons des grandes préoccupations avec cette politique des États-Unis. Nous sommes en discussion avec les États-Unis depuis des mois sur cette question. Je peux dire seulement que nous continuerons à tenter de régler cette situation.

JOURNALISTE: Mais vous continuez...

DIMITRI SOUDAS: On va continuer, we'll continue with Erin Henderson, 680 News. Erin Henderson, 680 News? Right over here.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, can you just explain, I'm just a little unclear on what exactly is going on over the next 15 months specifically, and then when can kids start seeing tangible results if this is just a pilot project?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, over the next 15 months, we'll be...I suppose I'm not the one to give the details, some of them can give more details later. Over the next 15 months in the six surgical areas will be accumulation of information on wait times and on recourse when the wait times are not...when surgeries are not available in a timely manner locally, and as well as developing that information, that database, there'll also be a plan developed to better use resources to facilitate recourse mechanisms in the future. So really, this is an information gathering exercise. The fact of the matter is as Dr. Postl and others have said, one of the biggest impediments to better management of resources in the healthcare system to dealing with wait times is the lack of information across the system, on how people are

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being treated and what kind of timeframes they're being treated and what recourses they're using currently.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: On va continuer avec Catherine Paradis, Radio-Canada radio.

JOURNALISTE: Dites-moi qu'est-ce que vous pensez de la décision de M. Bush hier d'envoyer 20 000 soldats supplémentaires en Irak.

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Évidemment c'est une décision du gouvernement des États-Unis. Comme vous savez, le gouvernement du Canada ne participe pas dans les opérations militaires en Irak. Nous sommes là seulement dans la capacité du développement de la capacité du gouvernement et de développement économique et civil, alors c'est une décision pour les États-Unis. Notre préoccupation est évidemment en Afghanistan. La situation en Afghanistan est beaucoup différente. Il n'y a pas de guerre civile. Il y a évidemment des problèmes de sécurité, mais il n'y a pas d'une guerre civile. Il y a un gouvernement démocratiquement élu avec l'appui de la population, et nous travaillons avec ce gouvernement et avec nos alliés pour améliorer la situation en Afghanistan.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with Chris Wattie, CanWest. Ok, we'll continue on Steve Roberts, CFRB.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Sir, just let you get the mic.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: If you want to just move up front a little bit please?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Sorry to squeeze you in here, but the room's used to having children in it. (LAUGHTER)

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REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, Jean Lapierre has announced that he is stepping away from politics to possibly host a television show of sorts. May I get your reaction to that?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: I don't know that I want to give much reaction. I've known Mr. Lapierre a long time. I wish him well. I watch kind of the exits from the Liberal Party with interest, but beyond that I don't have much comment.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Richard Maden, City TV.

REPORTER: Hi Prime Minister, just with respect to your wait time guarantee, other provinces have tried to reduce wait times, but inevitably it doesn't work, and they end up blaming the federal government. How will you guarantee these wait times? Are you going to give their money back, or how can you guarantee it?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, first of all I'm not accepting your...the preamble of your question. I think the issue to address wait times has only begun with earnest in the last year. We see promising initiatives that have been undertaken by a number of provinces, and most notably I think the province of Quebec has a fairly aggressive plan to deal with wait times. I don't think we're at a stage yet of saying that any of these initiatives have failed. I think we're quite optimistic about their success. I think the key to success, as we've said before, is not pouring, you know, vast amounts of more money into the system. As you know, there's a large additional injection of healthcare money going into the system over the next decade now. Really we have to orient the system towards getting results, and I think what Minister Clement and many others who have looked at the problem have concluded that the secret to making further progress is getting a lot more

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information about how dollars are being spent, how resources are being managed, and we believe if we do that as this pilot project will, we will identify opportunities for better use of resources to get better results.

REPORTER: But how do you guarantee it?

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with Margo...

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, ultimately, if I can say, ultimately what a wait time guarantee is, when it, you know, gets... when it merges in the final stages, will be a guarantee to patients that if you're told you're going to get service under a healthcare system, that service will become available to you. If it's not available locally, governments will commit to moving you to where it can be available. That's ultimately what a wait time is. We're obviously moving in that direction on a step by step basis.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with Margo Kelly, CBC radio.

REPORTER: Mr. Harper, what's your best estimate...

DIMITRI SOUDAS: If you just want to move up to the microphone please.

REPORTER: Yes, what is your best estimate, then, of when Canadians will have wait time guarantees? And secondly, I want to get you to see if there's any further commitment on mental health issues, because as much as surgery is an issue, people are saying in some cases it takes years to get a mental health diagnosis for children.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: All I can say briefly is mental health is an important issue to the government. It has been one of the areas that Minister Clement and I have been discussing in terms of future action. As I say, I don't think there's a...we're going to say here's a date at

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which wait time guarantees begin. We will move there in a step by step basis, and we will hope to see over the next couple of years some improvements in the wait times situation. I think there's some evidence that that is occurring, but it's not going to be, you know, we're not going to snap our fingers and say today is the day on which wait times are solved. It's obviously going to take some time, and as long as we can keep the situation improving and moving in the right direction, I think that's what the public expects us to do.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We have time for one last question, Mike Weiss, CBC Television. Mike Weiss?

REPORTER: Yeah, right here. Prime Minister, you made this announcement in a downtown Toronto hospital. You said you had treatment here as a child. You're off to Mississauga to meet with the new MP. Is this part of a larger profile-building exercise to win seats in urban areas next election?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, you know, I've...I think if you look over the past year, I travel around the country. I try to get out of Ottawa regularly, and I do get out of Ottawa regularly. I go to different parts of the country to meet people, to make announcements, to get information. I think that's part of being Prime Minister, and I...you know, what I find particularly is I'm so popular with your colleagues in the Press Gallery in Ottawa I think it's just essential that I go out and spread that good cheer across the country. (LAUGHTER)

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Thank you very much everybody.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Ok, great, thanks everyone. (APPLAUSE)

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