



-for immediate release-

### **Canadian Respiratory Therapists: Experts on the Front-lines of the Fight Against COVID-19**

[OTTAWA – March 25, 2020] Today, twelve thousand respiratory therapists across Canada are treating coronavirus disease in hospitals and in the community, while preparing for a potential surge in the number of patients needing their care. These health care professionals, specialists in cardiopulmonary care, are on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. Respiratory therapists are assessing patients and providing life-saving treatments like oxygen therapy and mechanical ventilation for patients who are no longer able to breathe for themselves.

“Respiratory therapists are unique in that they graduate ready to provide care in intensive care units. Other health professions typically require additional training to specialize in critical care,” according to Dr. Andrew West, CEO of the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (CSRT).

COVID-19 causes a range of symptoms. Most people who contract the virus will have mild disease, whereas some will require hospitalization or admission to an intensive care unit. A significant number of Canadians with coronavirus disease will likely require the insertion of an artificial airway and a mechanical ventilator to support their breathing. “Respiratory therapists are the experts in the science of using ventilators to treat respiratory illness in a way that is individualized for each patient’s needs as their condition improves or worsens,” notes West.

It is imperative that respiratory therapists continue to be well informed and appropriately equipped to effectively respond to the pandemic. From the outset, the CSRT has prioritized supporting the practice of respiratory therapists by hosting a relevant and timely repository of information on COVID-19. The CSRT has also established a national discussion forum for all members to share innovative ideas about evolving practice issues related to COVID-19. In a time when health professionals are being inundated with information of varying degrees of reliability, we recognize that it is crucial that they have a trusted source for accessing reliable and relevant information.

The potential for shortages of essential medical resources, such as ventilators and personal protective equipment is a major concern for respiratory therapists and other health professionals. Lessons learned from the SARS epidemic (2003) and the H1N1 pandemic (2009) have better-prepared the Canadian health care system for surges in demand, however in light of the facts that this virus will infect a larger proportion of the population than SARS or H1N1, the ongoing concerns of respiratory therapists require urgent attention. The CSRT certainly appreciates the substantial efforts of the Federal Government to address concerns related to the procurement and manufacturing of medical equipment, including ventilators.

The CSRT recommends that respiratory therapists be consulted as national, provincial and local procurement strategies are instituted, particularly with respect to efforts for emergency manufacturing of ventilators. Respiratory therapists have the expertise in mechanical ventilation necessary to effectively contribute to these processes, and to ensure products meet the needs of the healthcare providers who will employ them.

To that end, the CSRT has established an *Advisory Group on COVID-19 Ventilator Procurement* comprised of experts from the field who can provide recommendations to government that support the procurement and manufacturing of urgently needed ventilators. “We all share a common goal of safeguarding the health of Canadians through this crisis,” said West. “The CSRT looks forward to working with all levels of government in the coming weeks and months.

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The Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (CSRT) is the national professional association representing the nation’s 12,000 respiratory therapists. It has been helping its members prepare for this pandemic since news of the coronavirus broke in late 2019. From informing and advising governments, to providing resources to its members across the country, the CSRT has taken a leadership role in ensuring Canadians receive world class respiratory care throughout this crisis.

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