

**BC NurseLine Fifth Anniversary
Minister of Health George Abbott
Thursday, April 6, 2006**

Check Against Delivery

Thank you Lori.

It is a pleasure to be part of the fifth anniversary celebration for BC NurseLine.

Unlike nurses who work in hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health or doctors offices, most British Columbians may never meet in person the nurses who staff NurseLine. That means we don't have as many opportunities to thank them. So on behalf of all British Columbians, thank you for your tremendous, and often life-saving work. The dedication and commitment of the staff is to be celebrated and commended.

Around 140 people now work on the BC NurseLine service. This includes 18 staff who have been with BC NurseLine for the five years it has been in operation. Many of the original 18 are with us today for this celebration. This includes Wendy Lodge, the first nurse hired. Also present is the nurse who took the first call – Sarah Taherzadeh.

BC NurseLine has provided thousands of British Columbians with 24-hour, toll-free access to registered nurses over the last five years. NurseLine makes the best, most effective use of the health care system.

In the last five years the service has grown. The number of nurses working on BC NurseLine has increased from the 18 to well over 100. Nurses have received close to one million calls. The number of calls per year has more than tripled to over 330,000 and the BC NurseLine budget has almost tripled, rising to almost \$15 million in 2005/06 from \$5 million in 2001/02. An after-hours pharmacist support from 5 p.m. to 9 a.m. every day was introduced in 2003.

Since 2001, thousands of callers have been triaged to help people access a more clinically appropriate level of health service, enabling the delivery of appropriate and efficient care. Thousands of times, a British Columbian who was planning to visit their doctor, go to emergency or call 911 for help, has called NurseLine and ended up not needing further health care at all. Thousands of times a caller who has called in believing they needed 911 attention, has received advice and information that made them comfortable choosing a less emergent level of service, or taking care of themselves or their loved ones at home.

BC NurseLine nurses have listened to callers and identified a real, urgent need, and lives have been saved. These callers were told to get immediate medical advice, either through their doctors or through emergency service. BC NurseLine plays an invaluable role in the health system.

As you are very much aware, the Ministry is transferring NurseLine to the Emergency Health Service Commission. The Commission oversees the BC Ambulance Services. The move supports government's commitment to further expand and strengthen the BC NurseLine service. It supports our commitment to provide British Columbians with the tools and resources they need to make the right health decisions for themselves and their families.

It's an exciting time as we build on the work already being done. And we want you all to be a part of it. Thank you to everyone who is involved with all of the programs and services that provide information and support to British Columbians. Your work is noticed and appreciated.

I wish you every success and look forward to hearing more about the lives you've saved with your commitment and knowledge. As part of today's celebration each member of the BC NurseLine staff will be receiving an engraved key chain and, in recognition of all of the hard work and commitment, I would like to ask Kim Schmidt of the BC NurseLine to receive a commemorative plaque as a permanent thank you.

And now Dr. Penny Ballem, our Deputy Minister, will say a few words.