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TECHNOLOGY IMPROVES PATIENT CARE, REDUCES WAIT TIMES

KAMLOOPS – Patients in B.C.’s Interior will be diagnosed more quickly and effectively with today’s official launch of the Interior Health Tele-Imaging System in Kamloops.

“Our government made a New Era commitment to increase technology funding and digital infrastructure support to facilitate tele-health options that will expedite and improve treatments,” said Premier Gordon Campbell. “We’ve invested in fibre-optic links and state-of-the-art medical imaging technology to reduce the time Interior and rural residents spend waiting for diagnoses – and to spare them unnecessary travel when they’re injured or ill.”

Tele-imaging allows medical images from diagnostic technology – such as X-rays, MRIs, CT scans, ultra-sounds and angiograms – to be transferred digitally from remote locations to radiologists in regional centres. The new system will initially serve Williams Lake, 100 Mile House, Lillooet, Merritt, Clearwater and Chase, as well as Whitehorse in the Yukon.

Together with the federal government and community partners, the provincial government funds four tele-health programs across B.C. for a total of \$15 million a year. The programs include emergency and trauma, maternity, pediatric, palliative and mental health care, reaching out to more than 30 communities.

“Many health facilities in outlying communities have diagnostic equipment like X-ray machines, but they do not have the expertise to read and interpret the images,” said Alan Dolman, chairman of the Interior Health Authority board. “This technology will avoid unnecessary patient transfers, speed up treatment and ultimately save lives.”

Many of the 1.5 million diagnostic medical images produced every year by the Interior Health Authority have to be couriered from smaller B.C. communities to Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops, a process that can delay diagnosis and treatment by days. With the Interior Health Tele-Imaging System, diagnostic images will be sent digitally through fibre-optic lines to medical imaging workstations at Royal Inland Hospital to be interpreted.

“Tele-imaging has moved radiology into the future,” said Paul Battjes, executive officer of the Royal Inland Hospital Foundation. “We are thrilled to be a contributor to this tremendous step forward in the delivery of health-care services.”

The Interior Health Authority, Health Canada, Whitehorse General Hospital, the Royal Inland Hospital Foundation and other community partners funded the \$5.7-million tele-imaging program.

Tele-imaging has long-term environmental and cost advantages. Because chemical film processors are no longer needed, the technology is more environmentally friendly. It saves money in the long term by eliminating the cost of film, including storage and disposal.

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