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Jan 17/05

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**NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

January 17, 2006

Honorable Minister John Ottenheimer
Minister of Health
Government of Newfoundland & Labrador
Main Floor, West Block
Confederation Building
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL
A1B 4J6

Dear Honorable Minister:

The Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association is concerned about staffing levels of laboratory medicine specialists. At the present time there are 24 pathologists practicing in our province, with the imminent retirement or resignation of an additional four to six physicians from this group. Historically, the province has had 32 salaried pathology positions.

The provision of timely and necessary medical treatment or surgical procedures is critically dependent on the smooth operation of "laboratory medicine" operations, especially with respect to cancers.

Recruitment efforts over the past year to fill vacant positions in St. John's have met with little if any success. There is a shortage of pathologists throughout the country and Canadian medical schools are not graduating sufficient numbers to fill these vacancies.

The outlook for the next decade is grim and will precipitate increasingly aggressive competition among the provinces. Pathologists working in this province are among the lowest paid in the country. As a result, we have and continue to lose these highly trained specialists to other jurisdictions. Because the compensation gap between this province and our provincial counterparts continues to widen our ability to compete will continue to worsen and erode our capacity to recruit and retain pathologists.

..../2

Page 2
January 17, 2006
Minister Ottenheimer

The NLMA is requesting that you begin to address this problem immediately. A critical first step to any long-term solution will be to address the compensation deficiency. After lengthy discussions with pathologists across the province, the NLMA strongly recommends that these specialists receive the same bonuses now offered to oncologists and other salaried specialists providing significant services for cancer patients. This would be a helpful initial measure in averting the looming provincial crisis with respect to laboratory services.

We look forward to meeting to discuss this issue with you at your earliest convenience.

Yours truly,



Thomas G. Costello, MD, CCFP, FCFP
President

bcc Dr. Nash Denic