

# ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL MICROBIOLOGY AND INFECTIOUS DISEASE (AMMI) CANADA

For Immediate Release

## Canadians to Feel the Impact of Infectious Disease Specialists Shortage

February 13, 2009 (Ottawa) – The recent announcement that Newfoundland & Labrador will soon become another Canadian province without an infectious disease specialist has once again raised the threat posed by shortages in medical manpower. Infectious disease specialists and medical microbiologists diagnose and provide expertise in the management of human infections. These specialists are called upon to lead the fight against a host of serious health problems including: HIV/AIDS, hospital-acquired infections, pandemic influenza, food-borne infections, viral hepatitis and life-threatening infections like septic shock and flesh-eating disease. They also play a key role in vaccine preventable diseases, public health measures to prevent infections and infection control in health care settings.

The Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Disease (AMMI) Canada is concerned about the shortage of specialists in Infectious Diseases and Medical Microbiology needed to maintain advances in the care of patients with infections, and the viability of infection control measures now mandated by public concerns surrounding *C. difficile*-associated disease and multi-drug resistant superbugs like MRSA. AMMI Canada, whose members are ID specialists and microbiologists, work to reduce the risk of infectious disease transmission in health-care settings and in the community. They do so by diagnosing and caring for patients with infections, running microbiology laboratories and participating in international, national and governmental panels and expert advisory groups in an effort to provide the needed knowledge and expertise on these threats to the health of Canadians.

With these front line specialists already pushed to capacity, what does the current and projected shortage of infectious disease doctors and medical microbiologists mean in the event of an emergency?

Influenza experts agree that another pandemic is likely to happen and when it does, it will occur quickly. It has been calculated that the world will face up to 233 million medical visits, 5.2 million hospital admissions and 7.4 million deaths globally, within a very short period<sup>1</sup>. Canada will not be immune to this and its impact will be substantial.

The level of preparedness will have a dramatic influence on the outcome. “ID physicians will be at the forefront of our response to pandemic influenza, much as they were with SARS. A shortage of ID specialists and medical microbiologists will have a devastating effect on our ability to protect and care for Canadians from the impact of pandemic influenza when that occurs”, says Dr. Gerald Evans, President of AMMI Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response Global Influenza Programme. *WHO Checklist For Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Planning*. 2005.4

AMMI Canada specialists are pushing for continued preparedness in the upcoming fight against pandemic influenza and other infectious threats to human health. Research in other areas such as antibiotic resistance is another important contribution of AMMI Canada specialists. The ability to analyze and predict emerging trends in antibiotic use and resistance is essential to the health of Canadians. The effects of antibiotics are societal, in that antibiotic resistant organisms can also spread to individuals never even exposed to an antibiotic<sup>2</sup>. AMMI Canada is working to develop an antimicrobial stewardship curriculum for Medical Microbiology and Infectious Disease training programs, to provide new specialists with the skills to help other doctors use antibiotics appropriately. More doctors are urgently needed in these training programs, which take six years (after medical school) to produce a qualified ID specialist. Canada only produces 8-12 new ID specialists and medical microbiologists each year.

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) is aware of these challenges and is taking steps to reach a solution. In November 2008 the RCPSC held a consultation with the Canadian Medical Association, the College of Family Physicians of Canada, and the Federation of National Specialty Societies of Canada to address the problems facing the medical workforce. AMMI Canada was one of the participating specialty societies at that meeting. As initiatives such as the ones undertaken by RCPSC and the Pan-Canadian Health Human Resource Strategy continue to address these issues, the Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments must make funding available to safeguard the future of the Canadian Health Care System.

### **About AMMI Canada**

Preventing and Treating Infectious Diseases

AMMI Canada is the national association that represents physicians and researchers specializing in the fields of medical microbiology and infectious diseases. AMMI Canada works towards translating knowledge into effective policies and practice, to assist colleagues, healthcare professionals and industry members in their management of patients with infectious diseases.

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<sup>2</sup>Dr. Lynora Saxinger, *Osler, bad cops, antibiotic fairies, and why bacteria may win: The challenges of Antimicrobial Stewardship*. AMMI Canada Members Connect Newsletter Fall 2008, Volume 19, Number 3