



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Ground-breaking dementia research project funded by proceeds
from 20th Annual Pacific Spirit Run**
Video imagery research with dementia patients a first for Vancouver and BC

Vancouver, May 4, 2009 – A ground-breaking pilot project to determine if highly cognitively impaired dementia patients will respond to and be assisted by video imagery is the fundraising focus of this year's Pacific Spirit Run.

The goal of the project, conducted by the Centre for Healthy Aging at Providence (CHAP), is to explore how the use of audio-visual technology – flat screen TVs displaying video images of the outside world – may stimulate and maintain the interest of highly cognitively impaired seniors. A secondary goal is to find out whether or not this may help these seniors in their pacing and wandering around a special care unit by making the experience more interesting.

Flat screen TVs will be mounted on the walls of a special care unit in strategic positions to guide seniors away from areas that inhibit their movements such as the ends of hallways in H-style buildings. The images displayed on the screens will vary by scene type (e.g. park, street) as well as time (e.g. morning street scene changing to an evening street scene) to see if such changes can serve as positive cues for residents (e.g. evening scenes reinforcing seniors' perception that it's bed time).

Seniors suffering from dementia are usually perceived by others as being withdrawn and uninterested in their environments. Earlier research conducted by CHAP through Providence Health's Elder Care program has shown these perceptions to be untrue: in reality, residents with moderate to severe cognitive impairment are aware and do respond when there is an environmental stimulus of interest.

"This pilot project – the first research of its kind in this area – is in response to a major concern expressed by both staff and families of seniors living with dementia," said Dr. Sharon Koehn, a research associate with CHAP. "Dementia patients are limited in their ability to spend meaningful time when alone and not participating in structured activities. If not engaged, they face the risk of withdrawing further into their own private lives and not participating in activities that may help make their days interesting. Our expectation is that the stimulus provided by the video imagery may help improve quality of life."

The Pacific Spirit Run's goal is to raise \$75,000 for this research project. Dementia is a growing concern for our aging population. Today, one in 11 of Canada's seniors has dementia. In just five years, 50 per cent more Canadians could be facing dementia. It is not a normal part of aging. New and better treatment options are essential to improve the quality of life for those affected by this devastating and oftentimes hereditary disease.

The Pacific Spirit Run takes place Saturday, May 9, starting at Thunderbird Stadium, Pacific Spirit Park, UBC. Participants can choose between 10, 5 or 2.5 km routes. To register or pledge a participant, visit www.tapestryfoundation.ca. Proceeds from the Pacific Spirit Run support

dementia research. Tapestry Foundation for Health Care is committed to raising funds to support dementia research through CHAP.

Tapestry Foundation for Health Care was established in 2007 as an umbrella fundraising organization to serve and support seven Providence Health Care sites including Brock Fahrni Pavilion, Holy Family Hospital, Marion Hospice, Mount Saint Joseph Hospital, St. Vincent's Campus of Care, St. Vincent's Hospital Langara, and Youville Residence. The Foundation supports these sites by raising funds for medical equipment, programs, services, education, and research in the field of elder care. For more information, please visit www.tapestryfoundation.ca.

Dementia Facts

- Alzheimer's disease and related dementia is the second most feared disease for Canadians as they age.
- Dementia is a progressive degenerative disease that destroys vital brain cells.
- 70,000 British Columbians are living with a form of dementia.
- 10,000 of those British Columbians are under the age of 65.
- The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's disease which accounts for 64 per cent of all dementias in Canada. This will increase to 68 per cent by the year 2034 (within a generation).
- Dementia is a syndrome consisting of a number of symptoms that include loss of memory, judgment and reasoning in addition to changes in mood and behavior.
- More women are affected by this disease than men; women account for over three-quarters of all those with dementia.

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