

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Fraser Health pioneers initiatives to address cardiovascular health crisis in South Asian community** **South Asians dying earlier and more often than other British Columbians**

**VANCOUVER** – While recent reports confirmed BC as having the lowest heart attack rate per capita in Canada, our South Asian population is the major exception to the rule.

“We know that people of South Asian descent are more likely to have high blood pressure and diabetes and subsequently are at greater risk of heart disease and stroke than the general population,” said Health Services Minister Kevin Falcon. “While we continue to work on improving cardiovascular care for the South Asian population, the most important consideration is prevention – regardless of ethnicity – to promote good health and reduce the burden of chronic disease on the health system. It is why we have developed a rehab program specifically for the South Asian population in Fraser Health.”

Cardiovascular disease is a broad term for more than one disease of the body’s circulatory system including the heart and blood vessels, whether the blood vessels are affecting the lungs, brain, kidneys or other parts of the body. Coronary disease is more specific and is the most common form of heart disease, occurring when arteries in the heart are blocked, reducing oxygen levels and leading to complications including angina (chest pain) or heart attacks.

South Asians face a substantially greater risk of cardiovascular disease, which causes death and reduced quality of life. In Canada, they are significantly more likely to experience cardiovascular disease, with evidence of disease even in childhood.

Several Canadian studies have shown that South Asians have up to double the risk of coronary disease compared to the general population. Coronary disease is the most common cause of premature death among Canadian South Asians, accounting for about 10 per cent of all mortality. South Asians in North America suffer heart attacks at an earlier age – as much as 10 years earlier – and often without symptoms and warning.

And yet 90 per cent of all heart attacks are preventable if cardiovascular issues are investigated earlier when aggressive treatment can be administered.

“As 20 per cent of people living in Fraser Health are South Asian, Fraser Health is uniquely positioned to pioneer positive health outcomes for this community. Growing partnerships with research partners such as Simon Fraser University (SFU) build on Fraser Health’s sophisticated cardiac programs including health promotion, outpatient rehabilitation and tertiary hospital care,” said Dr. Nigel Murray, president and CEO of Fraser Health.

Fraser Health’s innovation in health service delivery has gone a step further in making a difference in the lives of many South Asian post-coronary patients through culturally sensitive treatment. The SunLife Financial Punjabi Cardiac Rehabilitation Education Program is the first of its kind in BC and was established in 2008 in response to the disproportionate number of cardiac-related admissions of South Asian patients at Fraser Health.

Patients in the nine-week program visit cardiac outpatient services at Surrey Memorial Hospital and receive support from a multidisciplinary health care team comprised of an occupational therapist, dietician, physiotherapist and nurse.

The program helps offset the cultural barriers that prevent many South Asian people from getting the quality of

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health care they need and in being proactive about their heart health. It focuses on specific dietary and cultural challenges, as well as the unique stresses experienced by South Asians facing language barriers when living with a high incidence of cardiac disease.

The program is free and accessible to anyone in the South Asian community who has had a heart attack, heart surgery or angioplasty, or is at risk for heart disease. Appointments and referrals are not required. Patients need only call the Punjabi-language number, 604-587-3849, and a Punjabi-speaking staff member will call them back to give them all the information they require.

"The Punjabi language cardiac rehab program is a crown jewel in Fraser Health's efforts to locally and directly tackle what has become a global health concern," said Dr. Raymond Dong, cardiologist at Surrey Memorial Hospital. "In addition to this program and related research projects, we are trying to collect more data and track population outcomes in order to improve our direct patient care, and to prevent disease from affecting the next generation."

Through Surrey Memorial Hospital, Fraser Health conducts Healthy Heart Fairs with an emphasis on educating the community on risk factors and primary prevention. They are free and open to the public and bring together health care providers from various disciplines in one setting.

This weekend will see the start of another innovative partnership. A public forum on South Asian cardiovascular health launches the inaugural Canada-India Cardiovascular Health Conference. Fraser Health is co-hosting with SFU the new, bi-national conference on cardiovascular health involving 150 key decision makers in the field. The aim is not only to find out why South Asians in India and Canada are susceptible to cardiovascular problems, but also how to reverse the high prevalence rate.

Organized by the not-for-profit Canada India Network Society, the Canada-India Cardiovascular Health Conference takes place at SFU's Surrey campus and BCIT June 19 to 23.

"The conference is a great opportunity to build links between Canada and India to support better health in both countries for the next decade and beyond. Comparative research between South Asians in Canada and India may lead to a better understanding of how lifestyle choices, diet and hereditary factors affect the prevalence of cardiovascular disease in South Asians," said Dr. Arun Garg, conference co-chair and medical director for Fraser Health's laboratory medicine and pathology program.

The conference starts with a free public forum on June 19 at Kwantlen Polytechnic for anyone to attend and, in particular, young adults of South Asian descent. Due to limited capacity, registration is required by Thursday at: [www.mitacs.ca/conferences/CINI2010](http://www.mitacs.ca/conferences/CINI2010).

Fraser Health provides a wide range of integrated health services to the largest and fastest growing population in BC. The health authority is committed to improving the health of the population and the quality of life of more than 1.6 million people living in communities from Burnaby to White Rock to Hope.

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