



June 21, 2007

SOGC Annual Clinical Meeting, Ottawa, June 21 to 26, 2007

Access to Maternity Care in Decline in Rural Canada: New SOGC President

Ottawa – New President of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) Dr. Guylaine Lefebvre is calling for more action to improve access to maternity care in Canada's rural and remote communities. The issue will be a key priority for Dr. Lefebvre, who will be inaugurated as the 64th President of SOGC, on Monday, June 25, 2007.

"We are running out of people who can deliver babies, and it is women in rural communities who are affected the most," said Dr. Lefebvre, who will become the Society's 64th President Monday at the group's Annual Clinical Meeting in Ottawa.

"Shortages are affecting women everywhere, but there is a widening gap between the health care women are receiving in rural or small urban communities versus what is available in larger urban centres," said Dr. Lefebvre. "Every woman has the right to a safe childbirth. We all have a responsibility – governments, healthcare facilities and practitioners – to address this issue that is affecting the safety of childbirth in Canada."

A declining number of healthcare professionals available to provide maternity care is affecting women in both urban and rural areas across the country. However, in rural areas and small urban communities, these shortages are presenting some unique challenges. With fewer healthcare professionals available to offer maternity care services, pregnant women are routinely relocated from rural communities into regional hospitals. This means women in these areas must travel long distances to give birth, separating them from their families and community at a critical time.

Other women's health care priorities are also receiving short shrift. Access to regular cervical cancer screening is also an issue for women in rural areas, where women are less likely to access regular screening and are thus at increased risk of cervical cancers.

Addressing the human resources shortages in women's health care is a key strategic direction of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada.

The Society has proposed A National Birthing Strategy for Canada to address this shortage. The National Birthing Strategy will generate new ways of addressing the underlying causes of the shortages, and by developing efficient, collaborative ways of allocating existing obstetrical resources.

Dr. Lefebvre, who is Chief of the department of obstetrics and gynecology at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto and an Associate Professor at the University of Toronto, will be officially inaugurated as the 64th President of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada at an awards ceremony Monday night in Ottawa.

For more information, or to schedule interviews on this or other topics related to women's health, members of the media are invited to contact:

Lisa Robertson
(613) 739-7032

Susan Wright
(613) 730-2020

Resources:

- **A National Birthing Strategy for Canada:**
http://www.sogc.org/projects/birthing-strategy_e.asp

About Dr. Guylaine Lefebvre

Dr. Guylaine Lefebvre is the 64th President of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada. She is presently Chief of the department of obstetrics and gynaecology at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, and is an Associate Professor at the University of Toronto. She has been significantly involved with the SOGC since 1993 and has been a member of SOGC Council since 1997. Dr. Lefebvre is SOGC President for the 2007-2008 term, beginning in June 2007.

Dr. Lefebvre graduated from medical school in Ottawa in 1985, and completed her residency in obstetrics and gynaecology at the University of Ottawa. She then completed a fellowship in advanced gynaecologic surgery at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

About the SOGC

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) is one of Canada's oldest national specialty organizations. Established in 1944, the Society's mission is to promote excellence in the practice of obstetrics and gynaecology and to advance the health of women through leadership, advocacy, collaboration, outreach and education. The SOGC represents obstetricians/gynaecologists, family physicians, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals working in the field of sexual reproductive health. For more information, visit www.sogc.org.