



NORTHUMBERLAND HILLS HOSPITAL

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NEWS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Reactor shutdown disrupts supply of medical isotopes required in nuclear medicine services – some patient tests postponed

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY, Wednesday, December 5, 2007 – A shortage of medical radioisotopes is causing a temporary disruption in diagnostic services offered at Northumberland Hills Hospital's Jock Reid Nuclear Medicine Clinic and other similar clinics across the province.

NHH obtains the isotopes from supplier Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS). BMS, in turn, receives the necessary components from a reactor in Chalk River. Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. (AECL), the owner of the reactor, stopped operation for scheduled maintenance last month. What was expected to be a two-week shutdown has extended into December and possibly beyond while electrical system repairs are completed.

“We’re not alone,” said Ian Moffat, Director of the Diagnostic Imaging department at NHH. “All nuclear medicine departments (hospitals and private clinics) within the province are facing the same shortage, and global supplies will soon be impacted as well. Only two reactors produce Mo-99 (molybdenum) around the world and the largest is in Chalk River, Ontario. Chalk River was supplying more than two-thirds of the world’s medical isotopes before it went off-line. Daily updates are coming to us from Bristol-Myers Squibb.”

Nuclear medicine is used to take pictures of a variety of organs including the brain, heart, kidneys and lungs. Tumours, infections and other disorders are diagnosed through the use of a radioactive tracer injected to assess areas of interest. The tracer is then photographed by a special camera that produces images to help physicians’ evaluate organ function.

NHH’s Jock Reid Nuclear Medicine Clinic offers diagnostic testing on a wide range of nuclear procedures, including heart studies. Bone scans and thyroid scans have been postponed this week, as have all inpatient procedures.

Radioisotopes are typically delivered to NHH on a daily basis. Until today (December 5), NHH was receiving a portion of its daily requests as supply was rationed out across the province. As stores diminish, so too does the supplier's ability to provide limited amounts.

It is not known when the reactor will be brought back into full service. In the meantime, NHH will continue to stay in close communication with supplier Bristol Myer-Squibb. Some cardiac scanning is possible with alternative products, and this will be explored as an option pending the length of the supply disruption.

For more information, please contact Jennifer Gillard at 905-377-7757 or jgillard@nhh.ca.

About Northumberland Hills Hospital – The Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH) is located approximately 100 kilometres east of Toronto. The 137-bed hospital delivers a broad range of services, including medical/surgical care, complex/long term care, rehabilitation, palliative care, obstetrical care and intensive care. NHH also sponsors a Community Mental Health Centre and an Assertive Community Treatment Team. The hospital serves the catchment area of west Northumberland County. A mixed urban and rural population of approximately 60,000 residents, west Northumberland is comprised of the Town of Cobourg, the Municipality of Port Hope and the townships of Hamilton, Cramahe and Alnwick/Haldimand. NHH employs over 500 people and is an active member of the Central East LHIN. For more information, please visit www.nhh.ca.