



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### "Alarmed" At Shortage of Radiation Therapists, Meeting Sought with Minister Fitch and Health System Collaboration Council

**Moncton, December 20, 2023** – The Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists Atlantic (CAMRT-ATL) and the Radiation Therapists it represents are alarmed at the current shortages of Radiation Therapists in the province of New Brunswick, particularly in Saint John.

Currently the Saint John Cancer center at the Saint John Regional Hospital is experiencing a 36% vacancy rate among its radiation therapist workforce. The radiation therapy service there, typically supported by a staff of 28 is now down to just 18 therapists. This shortage in radiation therapists is affecting wait times for cancer patients across New Brunswick who are sent to Saint John for cancer treatment. According to the New Brunswick Cancer Network, there has been a precipitous decline in cancer care delivery in the province these last six months. Whereas in May 99% of cancer patients were receiving their first radiation therapy treatment within the recommended four-weeks, only 84% of patients were meeting the same benchmark in August. The longer it takes to treat the cancer, the more likely it will progress. New statistics are not available for the fall, but CAMRT-ATL expects the delays to be worse. The situation will only get more dire for patients and staff if nothing is done.

Radiation therapy is one of four specialized areas of practice for medical radiation technologists (MRTs). The other disciplines of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), nuclear medicine, and radiologic technology are also experiencing historic shortages. Like those in radiation therapy, shortages in the imaging disciplines are also causing backlogs for patient diagnosis and treatment.

“Imagine being a patient and having to encounter these delays: first for the tests to see if the symptoms you are feeling are cancer, and then again to get the radiation therapy you need to halt its progress. It is heartbreaking to know this is what patients are going through because of shortages in our profession”, states Jennifer Carey, Manager of CAMRT-ATL.

Burnout and emotional exhaustion are on the rise with the professionals who remain. While wages need to be taken into consideration, the working conditions created by chronic understaffing themselves are a major contributor to further departures from the MRT workforce in New Brunswick and future shortages. The causes sustaining this crisis are the very issues CAMRT-ATL would like to raise with government and decision makers. Cancer is not waiting for this crisis to be resolved and CAMRT-ATL is asking for Premier Higg’s government not to wait either.

The association has been in communication with the Ministry of Health about this workforce crisis but has yet to meet with the Health Minister to discuss the deterioration that began to accelerate in the spring. “We would love to sit down with Minister Fitch and/or Premier Higgs as well as the Health System Collaboration Council and explain to them the unique factors influencing this growing crisis”, says Jennifer Carey. “We understand that there are shortages all over, however we cannot all be painted with the same brush. This shortage is serious. It is affecting the wait times for cancer patients. The situation can be improved if immediate action is taken and a sustainable strategy is created going forward, but we need the opportunity to share those solutions”.