

Gastroparesis and Dysmotilities Association (GPDA)

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Press Release

**Jeanne Keith-Ferris, RN, BScN
President/Founder**

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If you suffer from endless bouts of distressing digestive symptoms and your doctor is at a loss to help you, you are in good company. Approximately 3.5 million Canadians suffer from chronic dyspepsia, irritable bowel syndrome, acid reflux, heartburn, bloating and/or abdominal pain. Now, hope has arrived with the announcement of a new centre of excellence for digestive motility at Foothills Hospital headed up by medical researchers from the University of Calgary.

A new centre has been established at Foothills Hospital in Calgary, AB for the treatment of more severe digestive motility disorders and diseases. Called the Centre for Digestive Motility (CDM), it is the first and only centre of its kind to be established in all of Canada.

Why is this important to Calgarians and Canadians? Unbeknownst to many, persistent symptoms such as heartburn, bloating, abdominal discomfort or pain, an uncomfortable feeling of fullness even after a light meal, nausea, vomiting and constipation reflect a common assortment of digestive difficulties. The vast majority of these symptoms in persistent cases result from a derangement of gut motor function (motility). Yet few doctors have taken the time to connect the dots to a family of gut-nerve disorders that we call digestive motility disorders.

For many people these disorders, although constant, may remain mild. However, as severity increases, at the far end of the spectrum, repeated hospitalizations are the result for a small number of individuals. While the simple act of eating often intensifies symptoms, many sufferers, in their search for relief, consume numerous over-the-counter medications and experiment with alternative therapies.

To place the problem in perspective, conservatively estimated, 3.5 million Canadians suffer from mild to severe upper-gut GI motility problems. Many of these people are Albertans. In order to help contrast numbers, only 165,000 Canadians suffer from inflammatory bowel diseases such as Crohn's disease and colitis.

While milder forms of digestive motility problems—irritable bowel syndrome, dyspepsia, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), and chronic constipation—are familiar to the public, more severe motility diseases representing digestive failure have diagnostic labels the public has never heard of: names like chronic intestinal pseudo-obstruction, achalasia, and gastroparesis. This patient population has been hidden from public view—they are too ill to even lobby on behalf of their own cause. What is shocking is that in the 21st century medical science has not developed a single treatment for digestive failure. Now, if your kidney, your heart or your liver should fail, an armamentarium of treatment exists.

Celebrities such as **Tammy Wynette**, **Johnny Cash**, and **Elvis Presley** all had their lives shortened due to complications from digestive motility diseases. Yet the public remains ill-informed as to the seriousness of these digestive nerve-gut motor disturbances.

Individuals with Type I diabetes may develop paralysis of the stomach, a condition known as gastroparesis, which devastates their ability to maintain good blood sugar and can result in hospitalization to treat constant vomiting. Many sufferers of Parkinson's disease may develop paralysis of the large bowel necessitating surgical removal. People suffering from AIDS, scleroderma, chronic liver disease, kidney disease, MS and many other disorders may experience a spread of their disease into the workings of their digestive tract. The impact on quality of life is so profound that many individuals are unable to experience the simple enjoyment of eating.

As is apparent, a new centre for digestive motility is long overdue. With a new centre in Calgary, hope can be rekindled for many patients and families across Canada suffering from digestive motility illnesses.

Across Canada and the United States, May has been officially proclaimed Digestive Motility Awareness Month.

To learn more about digestive motility problems, please attend our free public forum: *Community, Clinicians, Compassion: Finding answers for your digestive symptoms.* *A panel of gastroenterologists, nutritionists, and basic researchers providing answers for people suffering from bothersome to disabling digestive symptoms related to unknown causes or to digestive motility disorders (not inflammatory bowel diseases).*

Our public forum will be held on **June 14, 2008, in the Libin Lecture Theatre**. The Libin Theatre has seating capacity for 300, and is located within the Health Sciences Centre (HSC) Heritage Building, beside Foothills Hospital: 3330 Hospital Drive, Calgary, AB.

Doors open at 12:30 p.m. in order to allow time to browse the variety of information booths set up in the HSC Atrium. Other non-profit associations—MS, Parkinson's disease, lupus, liver, scleroderma, and celiac disease—will also be represented with information tables. Lectures to begin at 1:00 p.m. through to 3:30 p.m.

Free tickets will be available at the door to secure your seating.