

**MENINGITIS RESEARCH FOUNDATION OF CANADA LAUNCHES NEW
PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT MENINGITIS IN CANADA**

***~ The Portrait draws from personal stories of five mothers
devastated by meningitis ~***

Waterloo, ON – February 12, 2008 – The Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada (MRFC) announced today the release of a new Public Service Announcement (PSA), aimed to raise awareness about meningitis and the need for broad protection against the disease. Entitled *The Portrait*, the PSA draws from the personal stories of five mothers whose children have either passed away as a result of infection, suffered permanent disabilities or miraculously survived. The five mothers come from across Canada and include: Kathryn Blain, founder and chair of the MRFC, Waterloo, ON; Katie Grassie, Keswick, ON; Mary Clough, Muskoka, ON; Elaine Hamlyn, Mount Pearl, NL; and Sherry Webster, Quesnel, BC.

“Unfortunately, the mothers featured in the PSA, including myself, are members of a unique group – one that no parent ever wants to be a part of,” says Kathryn Blain. “After losing my son to meningitis more than 10 years ago, I started the MRFC to raise awareness and provide support to other parents who have been affected by this disease. My hope is that this PSA will help educate Canadians about meningitis and its life-long impact on families, and drive them to take action to protect themselves.”

The five mothers in the PSA are not alone. There are approximately 300 cases of invasive meningococcal disease (IMD) in Canada each year, with children under five years, people aged 16 to 24 and those over the age of 55 most commonly affected.

“Broad protection against meningococcal disease is essential to ensuring that no family loses a loved one to this terrible disease,” says Dr. Ron Gold, senior medical advisor, MRFC. “Advances in the area of meningitis vaccines mean that children and adolescents can now be protected against all four vaccine-preventable strains of the disease.”

The Portrait will air on television stations across Canada in both English and French.

Cast of *The Portrait*

Kathryn Blain, Waterloo, ON

In 1995, Kathryn Blain lost her son Michael to meningitis. After his death, she realized how little information was available about the disease, and as a tribute to him, she founded the MRFC.

Katie Grassie, Keswick, ON

Katie Grassie's son Keaton was fortunate to survive meningitis. After receiving the devastating news that the flu-like symptoms that Keaton had experienced earlier in the day were in fact symptoms of meningitis, the Grassie family thought that their then nine year-old son might die. While Keaton survived the disease, both of his lower legs had to be amputated. Today, Keaton is able to walk again thanks to prosthetics.

Mary Clough, Muskoka, ON

In February 2005, Mary Clough lost her 19 year-old daughter Mackenzie (Macey) to meningitis while she was attending college. Less than 24 hours after initially experiencing the flu-like symptoms commonly associated with meningitis infection, MacKenzie passed away.

Elaine Hamlyn, Mount Pearl, NL

Elaine Hamlyn's daughter Lacey is very fortunate to be alive today after experiencing an almost life-threatening case of meningitis more than one year ago. For several days Lacey fought the infection in hospital, and miraculously survived. Because Elaine saw first-hand how devastating the disease can be, she is now the MRFC regional coordinator for Newfoundland.

Sherry Webster, Quesnel, BC

When Sherry Webster's son Matthew passed away in 2000 at the age of 16 due to meningitis, he left behind not only his parents, but four brothers and one sister. Matthew is sorely missed by his immediate and large extended family. Sherry is the MRFC regional coordinator for British Columbia.

About Meningitis

Meningococcal disease or meningitis is a rare, but serious infection caused by inflammation of the lining around the brain and spinal cord. Approximately 10 per cent of individuals who contract the disease will die. Of those who survive, up to one in five suffer permanent disabilities such as hearing loss, neurological damage and limb amputation. Meningitis spreads through close contact, with the bacteria being transmitted through coughing or sneezing, sharing personal items, such as eating utensils, kissing and close physical contact.

About the Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada

The Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada (MRFC) was established in 1998 after a mother suddenly lost her otherwise healthy son to the disease. The mission of the foundation is to prevent death and disability from meningitis and other infections of the central nervous system. Through education the MRFC provides support to patients and their families affected by meningitis; increases public awareness of meningitis; and promotes better understanding of the disease among healthcare professionals. The MRFC also provides funds for research into improved diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of meningitis.

For more information about meningitis or the MRFC, please visit: [**www.meningitis.ca**](http://www.meningitis.ca).

To set up an interview with any member of the cast of *The Portrait* or to speak with a representative from the MRFC, please contact:

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