

**NurseLine Tour and Nurses Week Celebration**  
**The Honourable Colin Hansen, Minister of Health Services**  
**May 14, 2004**

***Check Against Delivery***

I'm really glad to be here today to see NurseLine in action and meet the people behind the voices British Columbians have come to know and depend on. I was at the old location once, and it's nice to see you in this new location now. I had an opportunity to take a tour earlier, and it's really fascinating to watch the NurseLine in action.

I bring greetings from our Premier, Gordon Campbell, who is very aware of the excellent service you provide and I don't think he's been to either location, but I'm going to encourage him to do that if he has a window of opportunity. I know he'd be impressed by the professionalism and efficiency of NurseLine. Even looking at the Reader Board is interesting, and I'm sure the Premier would be as fascinated as I have been.

This is a great day to be here.

It's the end of Nurses Week and this year's theme is "Knowledge and Commitment at Work". That's an excellent description of the nurses I've spoken to today. We don't hear about NurseLine as much as we should, especially when we consider that the line has received more than half a million calls in the 3 years since it began.

Unlike nurses who work in hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health or doctors offices, most British Columbians may never meet in person the nurses who staff NurseLine. That means we don't have as many opportunities to thank them. So on behalf of all British Columbians, thank you for your tremendous, and often life-saving work.

NurseLine fits well with our goal to provide accessible, affordable, patient-centred health care for all British Columbians. Our health care budget is \$10.7 billion or 43% of the entire provincial budget – more than all of the other Ministries combined with the exception of the Ministry of Education. With a budget like that, every penny we can save and put towards direct patient care takes on significance.

By providing British Columbians with instant access to information, advice and answers to their health care questions NurseLine makes the best, most effective use of the health care system. And that's where we save money.

So instead of heading to the emergency room for an ingrown toenail, a mild headache, a question about a current public health concern, or a skin irritation, British Columbians can call a nurse and be triaged over the phone. The caller gets immediate feedback and advice – when they need it, where they need it.

When we have a public health issue like SARS, forest fires or Avian Flu, people can call the NurseLine to get answers to general questions or concerns. NurseLine shone during those public health troubles – and that may be part of the reason the number of calls increased by 45% last fiscal year.

40,000 times since NurseLine began, a British Columbian who was planning to visit their doctor, go to emergency or call 911 for help, has called NurseLine instead, and ended up not needing further health care at all. That's an amazing number – 40,000.

25,000 times, a caller who has called in believing they needed 911 attention, has received advice and information that made them comfortable choosing a less emergent level of service.

On the other hand, more than 22,000 times, nurses have listened to a caller and identified a real, urgent need. These callers were told to get immediate medical advice, either through their doctors or through emergency services. So the stubborn guy who's had some chest pain and thinks it might just be heartburn and he'll wait and see, has been directed to emergency care or 911 – and there's a good chance his life has been saved.

A perfect example of this type of call is Christina and Leslie Haltner who are here today. Last December, the Haltners called NurseLine and spoke to Linda Nordgren, one of our nurses. Linda assessed Christina's symptoms as potential meningitis and advised her to seek immediate medical attention. The ER confirmed meningitis and cited Linda's timely advice as instrumental in saving Christina's life. This is the kind of story we like to hear.

We value NurseLine's ability to save money, but we appreciate even more it's ability to save lives.

One of the things nurses recognized early on after NurseLine started, was that about 10% of calls were medication-related. 20% of these calls could be handled safely by the nurses, but the other 80% which represents 10,000 calls each year, required the knowledge and expertise of a pharmacist. So we decided to enhance the existing service with the advice and input of pharmacists.

Pharmacy services are available during regular business hours in most British Columbia communities, so we focused on the hours between 5pm and 9am. When you consider that 28% of all emergency department visits are drug related, and 70% of those are preventable, there's no arguing how much sense this made. On June 19<sup>th</sup> of last year we added the pharmacist service, so that British Columbians can speak to a pharmacist outside of regular pharmacy hours, every single day of the year.

It works a little differently than NurseLine, which we can see in action here today. Instead of the pharmacists being here on site, they work from their pharmacy location using a

secure virtual private network. Since the program started, more than 8,000 medication-related calls have been transferred from NurseLine to NurseLine Pharmacists.

I'm very proud to acknowledge JDS HealthCare Corporation – the company that manages the Pharmacist Service, who has won the prestigious *Canadian Pharmacists Association Patient Care Achievement Award for Innovation*. In fact, the award, which recognizes outstanding innovation in pharmacy practice that improves patient outcomes, will be presented this coming Sunday in Ontario. I would like to add my congratulations to JDS and thank them and the partner pharmacies who participate in this program. Some of them are represented here today: Shopper's Drug Mart, PharmaSave and Overwaitea Food Group. The national recognition of your efforts and achievements is well-deserved, and we're proud of the work you continue to do.

We have a lot to celebrate this week – the amazing contributions our nurses make to health care on a daily basis; the excellence of our NurseLine in providing front line health care to all British Columbians; and the well-deserved success of the Pharmacist Service. I'd like to thank each and every person who is involved with all of the programs and services that provide information and support to British Columbians. Your work is noticed and appreciated. I wish you every success and look forward to hearing more about the lives you've saved with your commitment and knowledge.

Thank you.