



PATIENTS WITH RARE CANCER GET A SECOND CHANCE TO FIGHT BACK

Guelph, ON – [January 27, 2010] – When Morty Wagman underwent surgery to remove a gastrointestinal stromal tumour (GIST) in 2008 with his wife Judi by his side, he was faced with a concerning 55 per cent chance that his cancer would return. Then, his oncologist told him about Gleevec (imatinib), a treatment that could greatly reduce the risk of his cancer returning, and Wagman felt empowered and hopeful. Today, he and his wife applaud Health Canada for approving Gleevec for patients with this potentially life-threatening condition, at an earlier stage in the disease.

“At first we thought my only option after surgery was do nothing but live in fear of my cancer’s return, and we knew that if it came back, it could be a lot worse,” says Wagman, 71, of Toronto. “I was so relieved to learn about Gleevec following my surgery. For me, it represents new hope; a second chance to keep this disease in check and to go on living my life, spending valuable time with my family.”

GIST, a rare cancer of the gastrointestinal tract, is difficult to diagnose, causing few symptoms in the early stages of the disease. While surgery is the mainstay of treatment for primary GIST, tumours will often recur, months to years after surgery.ⁱ Recurrent tumours are often more aggressive than primary tumours, and are more likely to be fatal.ⁱⁱ In addition to treating inoperable, recurrent or metastatic GIST, Gleevec is now approved by Health Canada as the only post-surgical treatment for patients with primary GIST.

“As experts in this area, we are confident of the preventative benefits of Gleevec for primary GIST, and are now able to treat patients in an appropriate way, at the appropriate time,” says Dr. Shailendra Verma, Medical Oncologist, The Ottawa Hospital Cancer Centre. “Research has shown that 98 per cent of patients receiving Gleevec had not experienced a recurrence of the disease one year after surgery. This freedom from relapse has significant meaning to patients and the physicians who care for them.”

While the true incidence of GIST is difficult to determine, a Swedish study has estimated an incidence of primary GIST of 14.5 and a prevalence of 129 individuals per million population. This represents approximately 500 newly-diagnosed Canadians per year.ⁱⁱⁱ

“Data recently published in *The Lancet* show that Gleevec reduces the risk of recurrence of GIST by 89 per cent after surgery. Its approval means that many patients can alter the course of this life-threatening disease at an earlier stage, when it can make a huge difference in their lives,” says David Josephy, president of GIST Sarcoma Life Raft Group Canada. “Given the strength of the data for post-surgical Gleevec, we urge provincial governments to act quickly and provide reimbursement to patients who need access to this important treatment option.”

About GIST Sarcoma Life Raft Group Canada

GIST Sarcoma Life Raft Group Canada is a not-for-profit Canadian corporation, allied with the Life Raft Group USA. The mission of the organization is to ensure the survival of Canadian GIST patients, and to assist patients and caregivers in maximizing their quality of life. The organization also works to increase awareness of the disease amongst the public and health care professionals. For more information on GIST, please visit www.liferaftgroup.ca.

For more information, please contact:

Stephanie Yack

Cohn & Wolfe

416-924-5700 ext. 4043

stephanie.yack@cohnwolfe.ca

ⁱ Eisenberg BL, Judson I. Surgery and imatinib in the management of GIST: emerging approaches to adjuvant and neoadjuvant therapy. *Annals of Surgical Oncology*. 2004 May; 11(5): 465-75.

ⁱⁱ Life Raft Group. Managing Initial Recurrence. http://www.liferaftgroup.org/gist_recurrence.html. Accessed January, 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nilsson B., Bummig P., Meis-Kindblom JM., et al. Gastrointestinal stromal tumors: the incidence, prevalence, clinical course, and prognostication in the imatinib mesylate era. *Cancer*. 2005; 103:821-9.