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**Cervical Cancer Awareness Week Highlights the Importance
of Regular Screening**

Cervical Cancer is almost entirely preventable

London, ON – Alice Lukings thanks her lucky stars every day.

When her family doctor retired from practice, Alice was left without a physician. Alice did not feel comfortable going to an unfamiliar doctor for her regular Pap tests and she did not realize how much time had gone by until she started to experience vaginal bleeding. “I just attributed the bleeding to a symptom of early menopause,” says Alice. “Several years later I found a new family doctor and I had a Pap test. I was diagnosed with advanced cervical cancer.”

Alice is among an estimated 500 women who will be diagnosed with cervical cancer in Ontario this year. Of those women, approximately 140 will die from the disease. “Cervical cancer is almost entirely preventable,” says Dr. Monique Bertrand, Gynaecologic Oncologist at the London Health Sciences Centre and spokesperson for The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada. “Regular screening is an essential defense against cervical cancer and the best way to detect early cell changes on the cervix that might lead to cancer.”

In support of Cervical Cancer Awareness Week (Oct. 23-29), the South West Regional Cancer Program reminds women that cervical cancer is almost entirely preventable with regular screening, appropriate and timely follow-up of abnormal results and human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination. “In the past 30 years, cervical cancer incidence and mortality rates have declined by more than 60 per cent in all age groups due to widespread cervical screening with Pap tests,” says Dr. Bertrand. “Despite this progress, many women in the South West Region are still not being screened for cervical cancer regularly enough, or are not undergoing follow-up testing after an abnormal Pap test.”

Following her diagnosis, Alice underwent three cycles of chemotherapy, coupled with five weeks of radiation treatment and two internal radiation procedures. As a single mother to her son, Zack, Alice was determined to continue working fulltime throughout her treatments. To Alice, having a positive outlook was crucial to her

recovery process. “I looked at it like I would any other medical condition,” explains Alice. “You do what the doctors say and you get better. I didn’t have time to be sick.”

Alice feels very lucky for her health today, and is a strong advocate to her friends and family for regular Pap testing. “I am very honest with my friends and demand that they make time to get their Pap tests,” says Alice. “I may not be here today had it not been for mine.”

When and How to Book a Pap Test

Women are encouraged to ask their health care provider about how often they should have a Pap test, and to visit ontario.ca/screenforlife and complete the “Time to Screen” tool to find out when it’s the right time for them to get screened.

During Cervical Cancer Awareness Week, several clinics across the South West Region are offering additional Pap test clinics for women who have difficulty accessing cervical screening sites. To find out which clinics are available, visit www.FMWC.ca or call the Canadian Cancer Society’s Cancer Information Service at 1-888-939-3333.

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South West Regional Cancer Program oversees the delivery and quality of cancer services for the counties of Grey, Bruce, Huron, Perth, Middlesex, Oxford, Elgin, and part of Norfolk. It is one of 13 Regional Cancer Programs created by Cancer Care Ontario in 2005 to ensure cancer care is delivered according to province-wide quality standards.

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