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**PROVINCE ANNOUNCES GRADUATING PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS
ALL PRACTICING IN MANITOBA**

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**Graduating Class of 2015 Working in Clinics,
Hospitals Across Province: Minister Blady**

This year's graduating class of physician assistants have all accepted jobs in Manitoba, further strengthening the system and ensuring patients have access to the high-quality care they provide, Health Minister Sharon Blady said today, marking National Physician Assistant Day in Manitoba.

"Manitoba was the first province to put legislation in place to allow physician assistants to practice and we continue to reap the rewards of that decision," said Minister Blady. "Their skills and expertise will benefit patients across the province, improving access to care for thousands of Manitobans each year."

Physician assistants work with doctors to examine patients, order diagnostic tests, perform minor procedures and prescribe medications and treatments. This year, 12 students graduated from the Masters of Physician Assistant Studies Program, established in 2008 as the first of its kind in Canada.

"As the need for skilled clinicians grows in the nation's health-care system, the University of Manitoba is undoubtedly pleased by the fact that this year's retention rate sits at 100 per cent," says Dr. Brian Postl, dean of medicine, College of Medicine, University of Manitoba. "Physician assistants are a solution to our province's primary care provider shortage and we're seeing a positive effect on reducing wait times, decreasing costs and increasing Canadians' access to health care."

Nine of the new physician assistants will be working in Winnipeg hospitals, with four working in emergency rooms, two working in pediatrics, one in orthopedics, one in surgery and one in psychiatry at the crisis response centre at Health Sciences Centre Winnipeg. Another physician assistant will be working in primary care in Winnipeg's Point Douglas neighbourhood, with two working in Brandon in orthopedics and surgery.

"We are very proud of our successes in Manitoba where physician assistants are fully integrated, regulated and benefit from strong support both within the medical community and public at large," said Trevor Stone, president, prairie chapter, Canadian Association of Physician Assistants. "We are optimistic for the continued progression of the profession in the province and this proclamation is a wonderful opportunity to raise awareness and should be the leading example for the rest of Canada."

More than 80 physician assistants are working in Manitoba's regional health authorities throughout the province in a variety of health-care settings including emergency departments, surgery, medical rehabilitation, family medicine and mental health services. The minister noted this number exceeds a commitment made in 2011 to hire 50 additional physician assistants across the province.

"I feel there are less barriers to practice here, as many physicians and other health-care practitioners are aware of the scope of practice and the skills that a physician assistant brings to the table," said Cheryl Hirst, recent graduate, Masters of Physician Assistant Studies Program. "One of the many reasons I decided to stay in Manitoba is that the role of the physician assistant has been embraced by the medical community compared to other provinces."

The minister noted Hirst accepted a position in pediatrics at the Children's Hospital of Winnipeg.

Physician assistants become associate members of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba, ensuring their work is governed by the high standards of medical professionalism required by the college, the minister said.

Increasing the number of physician assistants is part of the province's strategy to improve Manitobans' access to primary health-care services including a commitment to have access to a family doctor for all Manitobans who want one by the end of 2015.