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New Arthritis Charter hands power to the patients; forged by collaboration among multiple groups

Its reach is broad and indiscriminate and its effects painful. Arthritis affects more than 16% of Canadians – most under age 65. It is Canadians' third most common chronic condition - after back problems and high blood pressure.

An alliance of arthritis-based organizations is proposing a shift in perspective for those with the disease so have produced the *Arthritis Patient Charter*.

The document outlines not only the rights of those who have arthritis, but also their responsibilities.

Linda Wilhelm is President of the Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance (CAPA), one of the groups that led the formation of the Charter.

She said the document puts forward a new way of dealing with a chronic disease.

"Along with patients' rights, our group spelled out patients' responsibilities," says Wilhelm. "Things like learning about the condition, speaking openly with healthcare providers and following agreed-upon courses of treatment."

All groups in the arthritis community worked together to create the new tool which they hope will help people with arthritis reach their full potential.

"We've had some push-back. Not everyone agrees with this approach," she says. "But the groups we worked with feel it is the most productive way to operate in our current healthcare climate."

The Charter is an update of the 2001 *Arthritis Patient Bill of Rights and Responsibilities*. To create the document, CAPA, working with the Ontario Rheumatology Association, reached out to representatives from the Arthritis Society, the Canadian Rheumatology Association, the Arthritis Alliance of Canada along with various patient groups and individual patients.

Over 730 stakeholders from across the country responded to a survey seeking input on the Charter's contents.

"We are grateful to all those in the arthritis community who supported this Charter," says Wilhelm, who herself has lived with rheumatoid arthritis for over 25 years. "We see it as an important step toward taking charge of your own health in the face of adverse conditions."

People with arthritis suffer daily from joint pain, swelling and stiffness all of which erode their quality of life and inhibit their ability to contribute to society. Many suffer from poor health and additional chronic conditions. They report reduced activities at work or are not in the workforce.

The Arthritis Society estimates one in five Canadians will be affected by the disease by 2035, further increasing the economic cost to society.

For more information: contact@arthritispatient.ca