

## News Release

### **Cancer patients with strong sense of meaning and personal value cope better with illness, suggests American psychologist**

**VANCOUVER, September 8, 2010** – Cancer patients’ spiritual beliefs, perception of the value they contribute to the world and views about their need and right to live will directly influence their ability to heal and the way they experience dying, says a professor of psychology who will speak at a radiation oncology conference in Vancouver this month.

Dr. Sheldon Solomon, a psychology professor at New York’s Skidmore College, will present his research findings on the uniquely human awareness of death on individual and social behaviour at the Canadian Association of Radiation Oncology (CARO), ([www.caro-acro.ca](http://www.caro-acro.ca)) annual scientific meeting September 22 to 25 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel.

“A significant amount of the human experience is focused on maintaining a sense of personal meaning and value,” says Dr. Solomon, an experimental social psychologist who focuses on the nature of self, consciousness and social behaviour. “Conscious and unconscious reminders of death generate many defensive processes to bolster confidence in one’s cultural worldview, and a sense that one is meeting or exceeding the standards of value.”

These findings have profound implications for health-care providers treating cancer patients and their families, he said. Cancer patients who are able to maintain a sense of meaning and value fare better psychologically and in many cases, physically, than those who become disillusioned and demoralized due to their struggle with the disease, according to Dr. Solomon.

“Additionally, preliminary research suggests that family members of cancer patients may favour more aggressive treatments for terminally ill loved ones in order to alleviate their own death anxiety, rather than provide the best end-of-life palliative care.”

Radiation oncologists, therapists, oncology nurses and other members of the team, who meet with and guide cancer patients and their families through the cancer journey, will benefit from Dr. Solomon’s presentation in supporting their patients throughout the diagnosis, treatment and follow-up processes.

Dr. Solomon is available for interviews prior and during the conference.



### **About Dr. Solomon:**

Sheldon Solomon is Professor of Psychology at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. An experimental social psychologist, his interests include the nature of self, consciousness and social behavior. His work, exploring the effects of the uniquely human awareness of death on individual and social behavior has been supported by the National Science Foundation and Ernest Becker Foundation and was featured in the award-winning documentary film *Flight from Death: The Quest for Immortality*; he is co-author *In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror* (2003, American Psychological Association Books) and co-founder of *The World Leaders Project*. Dr. Solomon is a Fellow in the American Psychological Society, a 2007 recipient of an American Psychological Association Presidential Citation, and a 2009 recipient of a Lifetime Career Award by the International Society for Self and Identity.

### **For more information and interviews with Dr. Solomon, contact:**

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### **About the Canadian Association of Radiation Oncology – Association canadienne de radio-oncologie (CARO-ACRO [www.caro-acro.ca](http://www.caro-acro.ca))**

CARO-ACRO is a national organization representing Canadian radiation oncologists and other professionals in the radiation therapy field, to promote the interests of radiation oncology in Canada, and to represent the specialty to governments, The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and other national and international societies.

CARO-ACRO's mission is to represent and support its membership nationally and internationally through the promotion of high standards of patient care in the practice of radiation oncology; to support excellence in professional standards; and to promote radiation oncology research and education.

CARO-ACRO is a partner with other disciplines in seeking to improve the outcomes of cancer patients, and provides a consultative authority to oncology related agencies, academic institutions and to the public in all matters pertaining to radiotherapy and oncology in Canada.

Currently there are 320 radiation oncologists and 1,190 radiation therapists practicing at 35 centres across the country. CARO-ACRO has a total membership of 687 members from a variety of specialties within the field: radiation oncologists (physicians with specialized training in the care of patients with cancer and the use of radiation treatment), physicists, therapists, radiobiologists, fellows and residents.



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