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## MEDIA RELEASE

### Canadian physiotherapists urge skiers and snowboarders to wear helmets this winter

**TORONTO (November 18, 2009)** – Winter is just around the corner and many Canadians are gearing up for the start of another skiing and snowboarding season. The Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) is strongly encouraging Canadians of all ages to wear helmets when downhill skiing or snowboarding.

The death of actress Natasha Richardson who fell while skiing at Mont Tremblant last spring has focused public and media attention on the issue of helmet safety. CPA joins a growing chorus of organizations who strongly recommend the use of helmets on ski hills. Those organizations include Intrawest, owner of Mont Tremblant, other major ski resorts and the Canadian Standards Association. Intrawest is making it mandatory for all young skiers and snowboarders involved in ski and snowboard programs to wear helmets on its slopes. The Canadian Standards Association has said wearing helmets on the ski hill can reduce the risk of head injury by 60 per cent.<sup>1</sup> It has developed a safety standard for helmets intended to help reduce head injuries for recreational alpine skiers and snowboarders, and is waiting for final approval from Health Canada.

CPA has many members who work in the recovery and rehabilitation of Canadians who have sustained serious brain injuries. These physiotherapists see first hand the effects a brain injury has on the individual as well as family and friends.

“The consequences of a brain injury, even what seems like a minor one, can be devastating and can last for a lifetime,” says Mary Solomon, the Chair of CPA’s Neurosciences Division. “A brain injury can result in physical disability such as paralysis, but more importantly can result in changing the essence of the person – how they interpret and interact with the world. Personality, emotions, thinking abilities can all be affected; life is forever changed,” stresses Solomon. “We need to protect our brains by protecting our heads, at all ages. Wearing a helmet is one good way.”

While helmets do not prevent all head injuries, they can minimize the effects of a blow to the head. They should be certified by a safety standard organization and fit comfortably but snugly. Skiers and snowboarders should make helmets part of their mandatory equipment. They can also minimize the risk of falling and injuries by being in good physical condition, warming up, and taking breaks. CPA has the following tips:

- Train your muscles by doing strengthening exercises that reflect the physical demands and movements of the sport (e.g., squats for skiing).
- Do a 10-15 minute gentle but dynamic warm-up, reproducing some of the movements of the sport you will be doing.
- Take rest breaks as needed. Avoid squeezing in an extra run if you are tired.
- Have even minor musculoskeletal injuries assessed and treated by a physiotherapist to prevent the risk of injury recurrence.

Above all, always wear a helmet! Help make the skiing and snowboarding season safer and more enjoyable for everyone involved.

#### For more information and spokesperson interview:

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<sup>1</sup> Sulheim S, Holme I, Ekeland A, Bahr R. Helmet Use and Risk of Head Injuries in Alpine Skiers and Snowboarders. JAMA. 2006;295:919-924.