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Nova Scotians Report High Quality Cancer Care

Hand-picked angels” are the words cancer patient Diana Delaney uses to describe the professionals who provide her with high quality treatment and care. Many other Nova Scotians echo Diana’s high regard for cancer health professionals. In fact, for the second year in a row, Nova Scotia cancer patients rated their quality of care higher than patients in other provinces.

Recent results from a national cancer patient satisfaction survey show that 78 per cent of respondents from the Cape Breton Cancer Centre in Sydney and 71 per cent of patients from the Nova Scotia Cancer Centre in Halifax reported their experience as excellent, very good or good. These percentages exceed the Canadian average of 68.5 per cent.

“Clearly, as Nova Scotians, we are doing something right, and Cape Breton is leading the way,” said Premier Rodney Mac Donald. “Providing top-notch care for cancer patients is something very close to my heart. Just like most families in Nova Scotia, I have people close to me who are battling cancer. One day a cure will be found, but until then, there’s peace of mind knowing the ones we love are receiving top-quality care here in Nova Scotia.”

Patient satisfaction surveys are one method of measuring the impact of care on patients. They help

quantify how well the cancer system is meeting patient needs and identify areas, which require more focus. For *Cancer Care Nova Scotia*, it is one measure of the strengths of our cancer programs. By using the same survey tool as other cancer agencies across the country, Nova Scotia is able to compare its results with those of other centres.

“Cancer health professionals in this province have made all Nova Scotians take notice because of their admirable work,” said Health Minister Chris d’Entremont. “It’s because of their compassion and commitment to each and every patient that Nova Scotians have rated their overall quality of care higher than patients in other Canadian provinces.”

Nova Scotia cancer patients rated their experience higher than the Canadian average in all categories surveyed including: access to care, information, communication and education; respect for patient preferences; emotional support; physical comfort; and coordination and continuity of care.

“As a health professional, there is no greater satisfaction than hearing from patients that you are meeting their needs,” said Dr. Andrew Padmos, Commissioner, *Cancer Care Nova Scotia*. “Our province is fortunate to have teams of highly competent, compassionate caregivers who are committed to providing their patients with the

(continued next page)

L-R: The Honourable Chris d’Entremont, Minister of Health; Ms. Mona Baryluk, Director, Cape Breton Cancer Centre; Ms. Diana Delaney, cancer patient; and The Honourable Rodney MacDonald, Premier, Province of Nova Scotia.



highest quality of care possible, and these survey results are a testament to their impact on patients. Still, there is always room for improvement and surveys such as these are one way of finding out from our patients about areas which need more attention.”

Cancer Care Nova Scotia is responsible for ensuring a high quality cancer system. Working with health districts, health providers, patients and family members, *CCNS* identifies needs and develops programs to support and ensure quality in all aspects of cancer prevention and care. Among these programs are cancer patient navigation, which has proven effective in providing education to patients and families and supporting them through the cancer journey in many ways, among them coordinating treatment planning.

The development and introduction of Excellence in Cancer Care, a suite of continuing health professional education programs is ensuring health professionals have the education they need to respond to patient concerns in areas such as pain and symptom management.

Patient education programming like the Oncology Interactive Education Series (OIES), is helping ensure that patients have the information they need so they know what to expect and are better able to make informed decisions.

The above programs and others are the underpinnings, which are helping to ensure Nova Scotia cancer patients and families experience high quality cancer care. Patient satisfaction survey results over the last two years support this claim. Since last year, patients noted increased satisfaction in areas including pain management, consideration of travel concerns, consideration of living situation when planning treatment visits and staff doing everything to treat cancer.

In this year's survey, 81.4 per cent of Nova Scotia patients surveyed indicated that health professionals made every effort to manage their pain, compared with 67 per cent of those surveyed the previous year. The Canadian average this year is 72.5 per cent.

In the category dealing with consideration of living situation in treatment planning, 69.1 per cent of Nova Scotia patients reported high satisfaction, as compared with 61.7 per cent in 2004. The Canadian average is 62.8 per cent. In the area, consideration of travel in

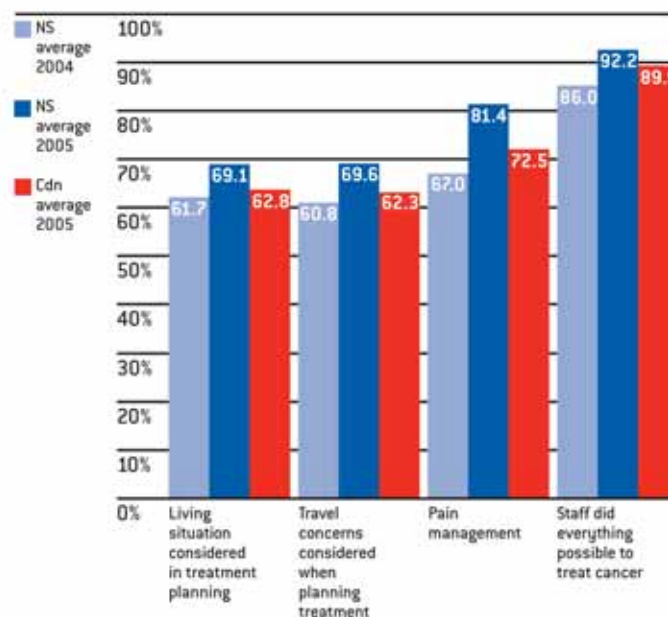
planning treatment, 69.6 per cent of Nova Scotia patients reported high satisfaction, as compared with 60.8 per cent last year. The Canadian average is 62.3 per cent. In the area of staff doing everything possible to treat cancer, 92.2 per cent of Nova Scotia patients reported high satisfaction, as compared with 86 per cent in 2004. The Canadian average is 89.9 per cent.

While it is gratifying to receive accolades from

patients about their experience with the cancer system, *Cancer Care Nova Scotia* recognizes there is much more work to be done. Efforts in the coming months will focus on areas where patients have indicated improvements could be made. These include emotional support; coordination of care; information, communication and education. By continuing to engage and collaborate with all affected by the cancer system, *CCNS* will develop innovative ways to meet these and all challenges as it works to continuously improve and enhance Nova Scotia's cancer system.

Cancer Care Nova Scotia, in partnership with the Cape Breton District Health Authority and Capital Health, contracted NRC Picker to conduct the Cancer Patient Satisfaction Survey. The Survey was conducted during the fall of 2005. All patients, 18 years and older, who had received outpatient treatment at either the Cape Breton Cancer Centre or the Nova Scotia Cancer Centre were given an opportunity to participate. Four hundred and forty-five Nova Scotians completed the survey.

Cancer Patient Satisfaction: Comparing Nova Scotia with the Canadian Average





celebrate life

Birthdays, a new job, a new home, a new baby... many of us have taken time to share and celebrate these milestone moments with family and friends, yet each and every moment in life is precious. These present, every-day moments are all any of us can really count on, but often we are so busy fretting about the past and planning for the future, it's easy to let them slip away.

Celebrate Life 2006 is all about enjoying and celebrating all those moments and the people around us who make life special. It's an opportunity to come together as a community to pay tribute to those who are living with, through or beyond cancer; and to recognize the many dedicated health professionals who are committed to providing our family and friends with compassionate, high quality, cancer treatment and care. Today more than 28,000 Nova Scotians make up our community of cancer survivors. They know, better than most, that each and every moment and memory should be cherished.

Terry Kelly, award winning musician, cancer survivor and Honourary Chair of *Celebrate Life 2006*, knows only too well the challenges of living beyond a cancer diagnosis and the true value of celebrating these every-day moments. Terry successfully captured the essence and many emotions we experience in the face of challenge in an original song, *Celebrate Life*. It was written and produced by Terry, in partnership with *Cancer Care Nova Scotia*, to honour and recognize those whose lives have been affected by cancer. It will be debuted during *Celebrate Life 2006*.

Carly Bunyan, like Terry, also believes in meeting a challenge head on. A native of Troy, Nova Scotia, Carly is a student at

the University of Maine and a member of their women's track and field team. She was in the middle of training for competition in 2002 when she was diagnosed with a brain tumour. She had surgery and following her recovery, she returned to her training, and successfully placed in many meets this past year. Carly's courage and positive approach to life while dealing with her cancer diagnosis, has earned her the N4A Wilma Rudolph Student Athlete Achievement Award. The award is presented to student athletes who have overcome great personal, academic and/or emotional odds to achieve academic success while participating in intercollegiate athletics.

As the inspirational speaker for *Celebrate Life 2006*, Carly will share her personal message about the ways she has been able to remain positive, be thankful for and celebrate each and every moment life has to offer while facing overwhelming obstacles.

Presented by *CCNS*, with support from corporate sponsors, *Celebrate Life 2006* is an opportunity for all who have been touched by cancer to come together to celebrate survivorship, as well as *(continued next page)*





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This is a newsletter for and about the people and issues affected by Nova Scotia's cancer care system. It is produced by *Cancer Care Nova Scotia*.

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If you want to be added to our mailing list, or if you want to regularly receive additional copies of this newsletter for your office or waiting room, please contact us at the above address with the number of newsletters you need.

The deadline for articles and story ideas for Volume VII, Issue Three is June 7, 2006.

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remember those who lost their lives to the disease. *Celebrate Life* provides an opportunity to recognize the strength of individuals, the valuable support of loved ones, advancements in research, and the compassion of health professionals who have dedicated their lives to cancer patients and their families.

"*Celebrate Life* is all about reminding ourselves that every moment is worthy of celebration," said Emmie Luther-Hiltz, Coordinator of *CCNS'* Cancer Patient Family Network. "It's about the strength of coming together as a community and knowing that with the support and love of family and friends, there is life after a cancer diagnosis."

***Celebrate Life 2006* will be held on Sunday, June 4, between 2 and 4 p.m. at Pier 21 in Halifax.** Terry Kelly has organized a fantastic line-up of talented

performers for the event: **Lennie Gallant, Floyd King, Le Marchant St. Thomas Elementary Choir, Kendra MacGillivray**, as well as Terry himself. Information from local cancer-related organizations will also be available.

Admission is free and doors open at 1 p.m. Call 1-866-599-2267 for more information or visit the *CCNS* website at www.cancercare.ns.ca

Mark June 4 on your calendar and plan to attend *Celebrate Life 2006*. Together, we will celebrate, remember, pay tribute, and hope.

Special thanks to our gold sponsors: Canadian Cancer Society – Nova Scotia Division, Hoffman-La-Roche Limited, Manulife Financial, and sanofi-aventis Canada Inc.

CCNS' *Celebrate Life* is an annual event that marks National Cancer Survivors Day. Every year on the first Sunday in June, Cancer Survivors Day celebrations are held in hundreds of communities in countries around the world.

Family Doctors Provide Excellent Follow-up Care

R E S E A R C H
A Canadian research study, comparing follow up care for breast cancer patients provided by family doctors with that provided by cancer specialists, has concluded that follow up care by family doctors is a safe and acceptable alternative to specialist follow up.

The research study followed 968 Ontario women with early stage breast cancer who had completed active treatment. Four hundred and eighty three women received follow up care from their family physician. They were referred back to the cancer centre if they had a recurrence or new primary cancer. The remaining 485 women received follow up care from the cancer centre. Both groups were followed for a median of 3.5 years. Two outcomes were measured and compared: the number of serious clinical events and quality of life.

The results indicated that 16 of those patients who received follow up care from family physicians experienced a serious clinical event compared with 18 patients who received follow up from the cancer centre.

"This is great news for patients, cancer specialists and family physicians," said Dr. Eva Grunfeld, principal investigator and lead author of the study. Dr. Grunfeld is also professor of medicine, Dalhousie University and Capital Health, and Director, Cancer Outcomes Research Program, *Cancer Care Nova Scotia*.

"The study confirms that Nova Scotia is leading the way, as the follow up care for breast cancer patients here is already provided by family doctors," said Dr. Grunfeld. "The study results show that patients

can be confident that the follow up care they are receiving in their home community is comparable to the care they would be receiving if they travelled to a cancer centre.

"For cancer specialists, who have ever increasing workloads and who are in high demand across Canada, the findings support a decision to focus their attention on patients who are in active treatment, with the knowledge that follow up care is being ably handled by family physicians. At the same time, family physicians are to be commended for the high quality, follow up cancer care they are providing in their communities," said Dr. Grunfeld.

"These study results confirm the importance and quality of community cancer care," said Dr. Andrew Padmos, Commissioner, *Cancer Care Nova Scotia*. "The issue of follow up care and the need for quality cancer care at the community level will continue to grow as our population ages and as we continue to get better at diagnosing cancer earlier and treating it more effectively.

"Family physicians play an integral role in the strength and quality of our cancer system both today and into the future. By supporting them in their evolving role to provide community cancer care, we will enable our cancer specialists to focus on patients who require their expertise to determine best treatment options and care during the treatment."

This research project was funded by the Canadian Breast Cancer Research Alliance. Details of the study were published in the February 20, 2006 issue of the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*.