

Understanding Cancer in Nova Scotia



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Cancer is a complicated disease that changes the people it touches forever. In our province alone, 14 Nova Scotians are diagnosed with an invasive cancer every day. This number increases to 23 when all forms of cancer are included. Add to this, the 28,000 Nova Scotians who are already living with an invasive cancer and one has a sense of the kind of burden this disease places on patients, their families, communities and our health system.

"Having the right information is essential to making the best decisions for Nova Scotia cancer patients and their families," said The Honourable Chris d'Etremont, Minister of Health. "We will use this kind of data, for example, as we plan and develop satellite oncology services across the province, so patients can receive treatment closer to home."

Cancer Care Nova Scotia's Surveillance and Epidemiology Unit (SEU) collects and analyzes data including the age and sex of an individual at diagnosis, the kind of cancer they have, where they live, the kinds of treatment they are receiving and the outcome of such treatments. A report outlining Nova Scotia's progress on the cancer front, with a focus on 2000-2004, was recently released.

Key findings from the report include:

- Prostate, lung and colorectal cancers accounted for 59 per cent of cancers diagnosed in males between 2000 and 2004.
- Breast, colorectal and lung cancers accounted for 57 per cent of cancers diagnosed in females between 2000 and 2004.
- The rate of invasive breast cancer, the most commonly diagnosed cancer among women, has declined 13.5 per cent since 1998.
- The rate of cervical cancer has decreased 54 per cent between 1971 and 2004.
- Lung cancer was the leading cause of cancer deaths between 2000 and 2004 for both males and females, accounting for 31 per cent and 24 percent of deaths, respectively.
- Male mortality due to cancer has decreased significantly since 1992, largely because of a 24 per cent decline in mortality associated with lung cancer.
- Nearly 50 per cent of all cancers are preventable through the adoption of healthy eating habits, active and tobacco-free lifestyles and by avoiding exposure to ultraviolet rays and known environmental carcinogens and infectious agents.

"The data pointing to a significant decline in invasive breast and cervical cancers provides a ringing endorsement of the value of evidence-based screening programs," said Ms. Theresa Marie Underhill, Chief Operating Officer, Cancer Care Nova Scotia. "Information in the report also underscores the value of implementing policies and programs to support individuals in making healthy choices regarding diet, activity and lifestyles to prevent cancer whenever possible."

Dr. Rob Strang, Acting Deputy, Provincial Medical Officer of Health, and President of Smoke Free Nova

From the left: Mr. Ron Dewar, Ms. Nathalie Saint Jacques, Mr. Gordon Walsh, epidemiologists, Surveillance and Epidemiology Unit, CCNS.



Understanding Cancer in Nova Scotia (cont'd from front page)

Scotia notes that the development and evolution of our comprehensive Tobacco Control Strategy is driven by data. He cites it as one example of healthy public policy that is beginning to make a difference.

“The data clearly tells us that our success in decreasing our smoking rate from 30 per cent in 2001 when we implemented the Strategy to 21 per cent today will result in saved lives, healthier communities and health care dollars that can be invested elsewhere,” said Dr. Strang. “We’ve seen a significant decline in deaths in men due to cancer, primarily because of a drop in lung cancer mortality and we’re beginning to see hints of a decline in women aged 55-69. However, the data shows that lung cancer is still the leading cause of deaths among both men and women. This is our reminder to stay the course with tobacco control or risk losing the gains we have made. It’s also a reminder that effective prevention efforts need to be long-term,

adequately resourced and implemented in an integrated manner.”

An integrated approach to all components on the cancer control continuum from prevention and screening, to diagnosis and treatment, through to supportive care and palliation, is essential to ensuring that we prevent cancer whenever possible, find it early, treat it effectively, and provide optimal supports and symptom control so that people living with the disease have the best quality of life possible.

Health professionals, administrators, policy makers and government staff all rely on good data and analysis to make the right decisions along the cancer control continuum. A report such as ‘Understanding Cancer in Nova Scotia’ demonstrates *Cancer Care Nova Scotia’s* ongoing commitment to support high quality cancer prevention, treatment and care through evidence-based decision making.

The Cancer Control Continuum



Leadership – Nova Scotia Style

Influencing the National Cancer Agenda

He describes himself as a local public health practitioner, but Dr. Rob Strang brings so much to the table with this simple description. He is currently Acting Deputy, Provincial Medical Officer of Health and President of Smoke Free Nova Scotia. With these roles, Dr. Strang brings a unique perspective and breadth of experience as a member of the Primary Prevention Action Group, one of the national priority groups established by the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control.

Dr. Strang began his career as a family physician, but found the role lacking in terms of being able to make a lasting difference.

“As a family doctor, I would see patients who were victims of spousal abuse or who had various addiction-related problems and I really felt like I was just putting a band-aid on issues,” said Dr. Strang. “I knew I needed to do something where I felt I could make a greater impact. That’s when I decided to do a residency in community medicine.”

This career shift eventually led to the position of Medical Officer of Health for Capital Health, a position Dr. Strang held from 1999 until recently (December 2006). During this time, he also advised government on the development of healthy public policies and strategies, which support healthy communities and make healthy choices the easy choices for Nova Scotians.

Through the efforts of Dr. Strang and many others, Nova Scotia has accomplished a great deal in cancer prevention. We currently have the strongest smoke-free legislation in the country, which is beginning to pay dividends in lower lung cancer incidence rates in men and is starting to show some promise in women. The Nova Scotia Alliance for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity and Sun Safe Nova Scotia are other examples of Nova Scotia’s coordinated, comprehensive approach to prevention.

Dr. Strang brings lessons learned from this strategic approach to the Primary Prevention Action Group and works with other committee members to ensure that the decisions made at the national level will





have a benefit locally. He believes that an integrated approach to prevention, which builds on existing local strengths, will reap the greatest benefit.

“Building capacity for primary prevention at the local level, where actions actually occur, will be key to our success,” said Dr. Strang. “We know much of what we need to do to prevent cancer and other diseases. What is lacking are the people and the resources to work in and with communities to improve health. Providing resources to provincial cancer agencies to

enhance their ability to do prevention is one approach for consideration.”

Among the priorities being discussed and addressed through the Primary Prevention Action Group are integrating cancer prevention with other chronic disease prevention initiatives as well as sun safety and occupational and environmental carcinogens.

The Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control recently received funding from the federal government and has been renamed the Canadian Partnership against Cancer.

Promoting Tobacco-Free Sport and Recreation



Members of the Cole Harbour Soccer Club were trail blazers when they implemented Tobacco-Free Soccer in 2003, an effective practice described in the ACT (Action in your Community against Tobacco) tool kit. With funding from the Southeastern Community Health Board and support from ACT, the club

produced tobacco free promotional items including soccer badges, t-shirts, whistle straps, podium signs, banners and flags to promote their policy to members and supporters.

Four years later, nine other community organizations are involved in what has become Tobacco Free Sport and Recreation. Members include Alpine Ski NS, NS School Athletic Federation, in partnership with Halifax Regional School Board, Soccer NS and Dartmouth United and Barrington Soccer Clubs, Tennis NS, Indian Brook First Nation – Lacrosse and Paq’tnekek First Nation – Recreation. Another eight organizations have also expressed interest including the NS Equestrian Federation which has recently adopted a new tobacco-free policy.

While most member organizations to-date have had a sport-related focus, the newest member of the team, the Girl Guides Association – NS Council is leading the way for other community-based organizations.

In January 2007, with funding from ACT, Girl Guides of Canada, NS Council will launch their Tobacco-Free Challenge 2007. Members of Sparks, Brownies, Guides, Pathfinders and Senior Branches will be asked to discuss the meaning of tobacco-free messages and

creatively express and share their perspectives on the topic using art, cultural or presentation activities. Leaders will also facilitate a discussion about tobacco with individual members or units.

In addition to implementing the Tobacco Free Challenge, Girl Guides of Canada, NS has developed and will follow a Tobacco-Free Best Practice Statement. The statement supports the provincial Smoke-Free Places Act 2006, and requires all members and volunteers to be tobacco-free and refrain from using any tobacco-related product during all Guiding events.

“We’re very excited about having the Nova Scotia Council of Girl Guides of Canada on board,” said Ms. Lara Sheehan, Coordinator, Tobacco Free Sport and Recreation. “They have about 7000 members, 5000 of which are under 19. It’s a great opportunity to get the message out to young people about the dangers of smoking and tobacco use.”

The addition of Girl Guides of Canada – NS to Tobacco Free Sport and Recreation may mean that other youth clubs may consider joining as well.

“We’re very pleased with the increased interest in Tobacco Free Sport and Recreation,” said Ms. Sheehan. “Our next step is to facilitate a healthy public policy survey among provincial and community sport and recreation organizations to determine who currently has tobacco-free policies in place and what they entail. This will provide us with important information about who we need to be reaching out to.”

**In addition to CCNS and the Canadian Cancer Society – Nova Scotia Division, ACT is supported by Public Health, Capital Health; Addiction Services, Districts 1, 2, and 3; Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia; and the Department of Health Promotion and Protection’s Tobacco Control Unit.*



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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*.

We welcome and encourage everyone's input to this newsletter. Please submit your stories or story ideas to: *Cancer Care Nova Scotia Newsletter*
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The deadline for articles and story ideas for Volume VIII, Issue One is February 6, 2007.

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Staying the Course for Tobacco Control

Tobacco-related disease kills one Nova Scotian every six hours. This sobering statistic helped prompt the development of our province's comprehensive tobacco control strategy, now entering its sixth year.

Today, Nova Scotia is leading the country in smoke-free legislation. On December 1, 2006 the Smoke-free Places Act came into full effect. The new legislation bans smoking in all public places, including indoor workplaces and restaurant and bar patios. The only exception under the tough, but crucial, amendments to the legislation is for designated rooms to be available in nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

"It's important for people to realize the dangers of smoking, but it's equally important to have a policy in place to protect people," said Mr. Steve Machat, Manager, Tobacco Control, Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection. "This new policy benefits non-smokers, past smokers and those who are trying to quit. It is an important part of the province's overall tobacco control strategy. Nova Scotians are encouraged that the Province has taken this step and many organizations have expressed their support in our work to strengthen the Smoke-free Places Act."

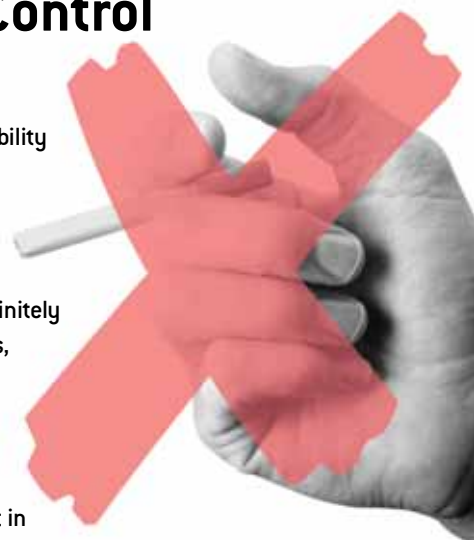
The recent ban on smoking in public places is the latest installment of the Tobacco Control Strategy. The next step, a ban on point of sale (POS) tobacco advertising, takes effect on March 31, 2007. This

effectively eliminates the ability of tobacco manufacturers to market to kids.


"We are definitely making progress, and are encouraged that smoking rates have decreased from 30 per cent in 2001 when the strategy was implemented to 21 per cent today," said Mr. Machat. "But, we're not there yet. We need to stay the course to ensure our efforts on the tobacco control front are truly successful. Our comprehensive approach is serving us well and we will continue to work with Nova Scotians to educate them about the dangers of tobacco use and to develop policies which support healthy, smoke-free communities."


For more information about the Tobacco Control Strategy visit: www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/tobaccocontrol.html


National Non-Smoking Week is January 21-27, 2007. It plays an important role in Canada's ongoing public education efforts to control tobacco-use. Learn more by visiting www.nnsw.ca



News and Notes

 Mark **March 31, 2007** on your calendar for the Surgical Oncology Network's Continuing Education Workshop. This year's workshop will review the Multidisciplinary Care and Management of Colorectal Cancer. It will include presentations on: state-of-the-art diagnostic workup; managing an emergency bowel obstruction; surgical and adjuvant management by stage and location; minimally invasive surgery- its role in bowel cancer; pathology reporting and nodal harvest; as well as the community surgeon's perspective. For more information please contact Sandra Cook at sandra.cook@ccns.nshealth.ca

 CCNS salutes Joanne Cumming, Cancer Patient Navigator, Pictou County Health Authority, who recently supported her 1000th patient since beginning in the role of Patient Navigator almost five years ago.

 An educational workshop for men (and their partners), who have been affected by prostate cancer, will be held on Friday evening, **February 16th** and all day on Saturday **February 17th**. Through presentation and discussion, participants will have the opportunity to learn about the impact of prostate cancer and treatment on a couple's relationship and on sexual and emotional health. Workshop facilitators, Dr. McLeod, and Dr. Wassersug, a research scientist and prostate cancer patient, will also provide information on how to strengthen communication and intimacy, including how to overcome sexual issues and what to do when conventional treatments for erectile difficulty don't work. For information or to register, call 902-473-2964.