

Showcasing Cancer Research in Nova Scotia



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Cancer: What causes it? How to prevent it? How to find it earlier? How to treat and manage it better? How to cure it? The questions are endless and new knowledge often leads to even more questions. The answer: cancer research! Nova Scotia is playing a significant role in finding the answers to cancer questions by leading the way as one of the fastest growing cancer research communities in the country.

"Cancer research has really put Nova Scotia on the map," said Dr. Gerry Johnston, Associate Dean, Research, Dalhousie University and past President, National Cancer Institute of Canada (NCIC). "Our partnership approach to building capacity and momentum, involving *Cancer Care Nova Scotia*, Dalhousie University, Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation, Canadian Cancer Society – Nova Scotia Division, Capital Health and the IWK Health Centre, has proven to be very successful. Our team has grown remarkably in terms of recruitment, endowed chairs, the number of NCIC grants and growth in capacity, particularly in cancer cell biology and health services research."

The fifth annual Cancer Research Symposium, held on November 10, 2006, showcased the broad spectrum of cancer research occurring in Nova Scotia – both at the trainee and senior researcher levels. The Symposium provides an

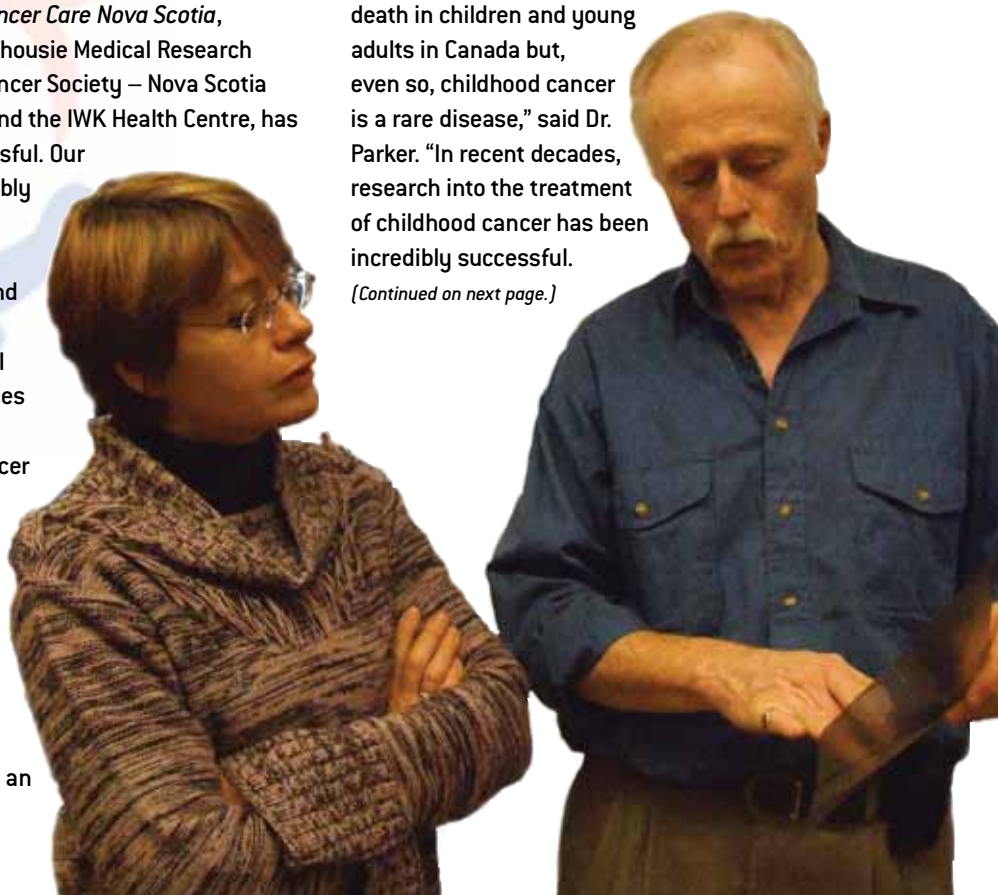
important networking and learning opportunity for the next generation of cancer researchers. It promotes collaboration, which is essential in moving cancer research forward. It also enables trainees, including master's students, post-graduate fellows, and residents to hone their presentation and communication skills.

Among the day's highlights was the keynote address by Dr. Louise Parker, Professor of Pediatric Epidemiology, Newcastle University, UK and recently recruited Professor of Pediatrics, Community Health and Epidemiology, Dalhousie University. Dr. Parker spoke about why children get cancer.

"Cancer is the leading cause of illness-related death in children and young adults in Canada but, even so, childhood cancer is a rare disease," said Dr. Parker. "In recent decades, research into the treatment of childhood cancer has been incredibly successful."

(Continued on next page.)

L-R: Dr. Louise Parker,
Dr. Gerry Johnston



Showcasing Cancer Research (cont'd from front page)

In the 1960s, the majority of children with cancer died. Today, eight out of ten children with cancer will be cured."

While curing children of their cancer is reason to celebrate, Dr. Parker said preventing it is really the ultimate goal. "Knowing the cause of the disease is one of the first steps in preventing it," she said. "But we know more about what doesn't cause childhood cancer than what does. Even though we know that more boys get cancer than girls, that more children develop the disease today than 20 years ago and that cancer is more common in some communities than in others, we are a long way from knowing why." Dr. Parker believes more work is needed on the epidemiological front to answer the question of why, so that action can be taken to prevent cancer in children.

Through the dedicated work of Dr. Parker and many others like her, cancer research is answering our questions and is allowing us to address other important cancer issues. As a recognized leader in both national and international arenas of cancer research, Nova Scotia is attracting and retaining the best of the best in researchers and clinicians.

Through the Cancer Research Training Program and events like the Cancer Research Symposium, we are providing the support and encouragement necessary to entice students into the field of cancer research, thereby grooming the next generation of cancer researchers. With the new knowledge we gain, we are achieving our shared goal of providing Nova Scotians with high quality cancer prevention, treatment and care, one step at a time.

Focusing on Colorectal Cancer

Improving and enhancing the standard of colorectal cancer treatment and care is the ultimate goal of the annual Eastern Canada Colorectal Cancer Consensus conference. The 25 medical oncologists from eastern Canada, who specialize in gastro-intestinal cancer, met for the second time in early November 2006.

Among the topics discussed were: genetics of colorectal cancer; pharmaco-economics of new drugs and drug approval; and the latest evidence in radiotherapy, chemotherapy and surgical management for the treatment of rectal cancer.

"The opportunity to discuss and come to consensus on timely issues related to new and emerging therapies and research means that we're able to speak as a single voice to government and policy makers," said Dr. Christine Cripps, Medical Oncologist, Associate Professor, and

Director of Continuing Medical Education, Ottawa Regional Hospital Cancer Centre; and conference co-chair. "Our

counterparts from the West have been holding similar conferences for the last five years and have found them to be helpful in improving

accessibility to new drugs and enhancing the standard of patient care."

Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in this province. This year alone, 760 Nova Scotians are expected to be diagnosed with this cancer. In this same timeframe about 330 Nova Scotians will die from the disease.

"As physicians, we are committed to providing our patients with the very best treatment and care possible, based on robust evidence from clinical trials," said Dr. Kiran Virik, Medical Oncologist, Capital Health Cancer Care Program and Co-chair of *Cancer Care Nova Scotia's* GI Cancer Site Team. "With any new drug therapeutic intervention in cancer care, the benefits in terms of improving survival and quality of life are clearly a priority. However, many of the new targeted cancer therapies are costly and as such are a funding challenge that we will only be able to solve if governments, pharmaceutical companies and society work together to ensure that the best interests of patients are realized."

Providing patients with the best possible treatment and care, based on the latest evidence, is the premise under which all physicians and health providers work, said Dr. Bruce Colwell, Medical Oncologist, Capital Health Cancer Care Program, who co-chairs the GI Cancer Site Team with Dr. Virik. "Our annual consensus conference is a powerful vehicle for

L-R:
Dr. Bruce Colwell,
Dr. Kiran Virik





discussing the latest knowledge, sharing our own best practices and determining how standards of care must change, while weighing the benefits and risks for patients, families and the cancer system as a whole.”

Results from the second annual Eastern Canada Colorectal Cancer Consensus Conference will be

published in oncology journals, shared with provincial ministries of health and posted on cancer-related websites.

For more information on the annual consensus conference, please contact Dr. Cripps at ccripps@ottawahospital.on.ca

Leadership Change...Dynamic Development

The cancer system within Nova Scotia remains a dynamic environment. Working together to ensure the highest quality comprehensive cancer system is a shared goal of all who work within the cancer system, especially those who work in leadership positions.

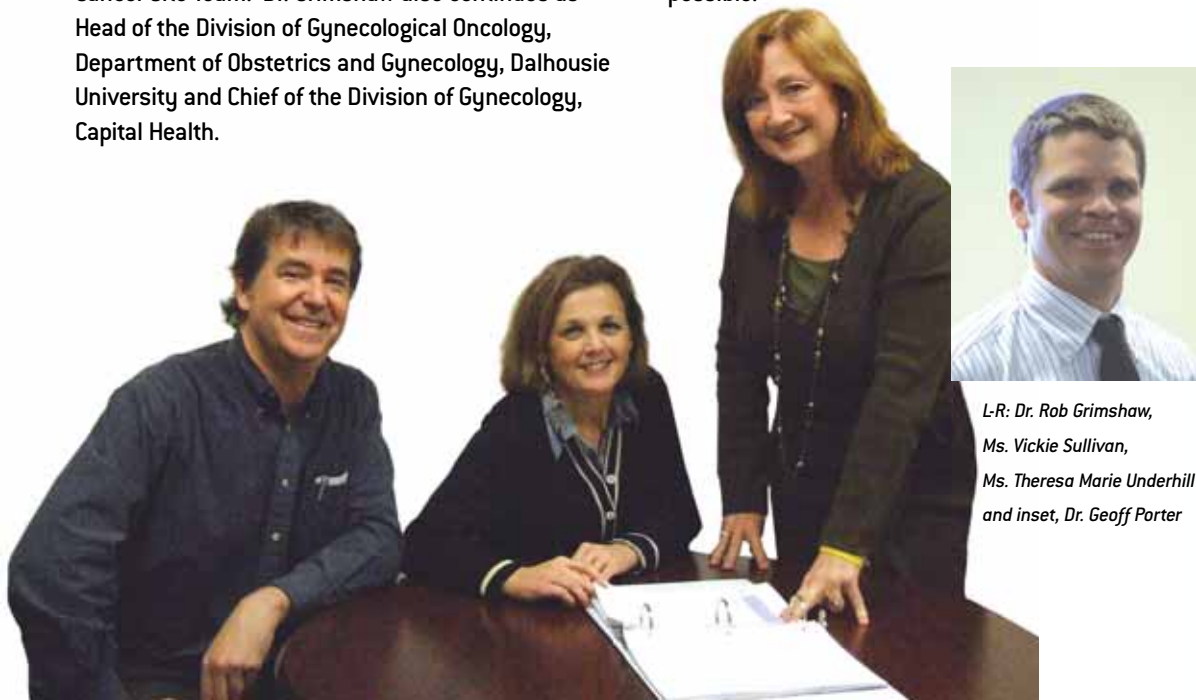
The July edition of this newsletter spoke of the departure of Dr. Andrew Padmos who served as inaugural Commissioner of *Cancer Care Nova Scotia (CCNS)* and as Head of the Capital Health Cancer Care Program from 1998 to August 2006.

CCNS, as the provincial program responsible for quality and access to cancer care, continues to benefit from the leadership of Theresa Marie Underhill, Chief Operating Officer with *CCNS*. Ms. Underhill has been with *CCNS* from its inception and has led its operational management and shaped its policy framework since 1998. Dr. Rob Grimshaw has stepped in for 6 to 12 months as Medical Advisor, working with *CCNS* to provide support and advice. Dr. Grimshaw continues in his role as Medical Director of *CCNS*'s Cervical Cancer Prevention Program and Chair of the *CCNS* Gynecologic Cancer Site Team. Dr. Grimshaw also continues as Head of the Division of Gynecological Oncology, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Dalhousie University and Chief of the Division of Gynecology, Capital Health.

The Capital Health Cancer Care Program is benefiting from the continued leadership of Ms. Vickie Sullivan, Director of the Program. Ms. Sullivan is working with Dr. Geoff Porter who has been appointed Clinical Head of the Cancer Care Program.

Dr. Porter, prior to assuming this new role, was head of the Division of General Surgery for Capital Health. He remains an Associate Professor in the Department of Surgery and Community Health and Epidemiology at Dalhousie. Dr. Porter also holds the Gibran and Jamile Ramia Chair in Surgical Oncology Research. His research interests lie primarily in the area of health services research with a focus on access to care.

CCNS and the Capital Health Cancer Care Program have different mandates, with *CCNS* responsible for quality and coordination of provincial cancer control and Capital Health responsible for delivery of care. Both organizations work effectively together toward a common goal – to ensure Nova Scotian cancer patients and families receive the highest quality of cancer care possible.



L-R: Dr. Rob Grimshaw,
Ms. Vickie Sullivan,
Ms. Theresa Marie Underhill
and inset, Dr. Geoff Porter



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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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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 Six is December 6, 2006.

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From Guidelines to Research to Clinical Practice...

Cancer Care Nova Scotia (CCNS) has been working with cancer specialists and district health authorities to develop management guidelines for cancers and supportive care issues to ensure health professionals have the necessary information to provide their patients with consistent, high quality cancer care. Our recent publication, the "Best Practice Guidelines for the Management of Cancer-Related Pain in Adults" is the first step in standardizing the assessment of cancer pain across Nova Scotia. The next steps involve implementing the guideline into routine clinical practice.

Any change in clinical practice should be supported by research. For this reason, Larry Broadfield, Manager of Systemic Therapy, CCNS, and Judy Simpson, Coordinator, Palliative and Supportive Care, CCNS, are conducting prospective research on the assessment process. Entitled "Evaluation of Validity and Feasibility of Standard Cancer Pain Assessment Forms in Nova Scotia" (ESCAPAIN), this new study will invite various Nova Scotia health professionals to test the newly recommended assessment forms. The study has received approval from the Research and Ethics Boards of four districts to date, and submissions are in process in the other five districts.


The study is anticipated to begin in Fall 2006, and

be complete within a year. Participants from all districts will be asked to use and evaluate the new assessment forms. Participants may include palliative care nurses and doctors, cancer clinic nurses and doctors and other health professionals who assess pain in cancer patients as part of their routine practice. Since the goal is to develop standard tools that can be used in different practice settings and by different health professionals, we hope to accrue a diverse group of participants.


By inviting health professionals to evaluate the standard forms, we will identify areas for improvement and enhance the assessment tool. At the same time, in seeking and responding to feedback, we will be familiarizing health professionals with the assessment tools and gaining their buy-in. Implementation of the new tools into clinical practice will standardize the assessment of cancer-related pain in adults across Nova Scotia, thereby improving pain management. We will keep you posted on the study's progress.

If you are interested in participating in this study, contact either Larry Broadfield at larry.broadfield@ccns.nshealth.ca or Judy Simpson at judy.simpson@ccns.nshealth.ca for the name of your district study co-ordinator. For those who don't have access to email, call us toll-free at 1-866-599-2267.


News and Notes

 The Halifax Regional Municipality's Prostate Cancer Support Group is a free information support group for those diagnosed with prostate cancer. Family members, partners and friends are also welcome. The group meets the third Thursday of every month except for July, August and December.

Meetings are held at 7:00 for 7:30 p.m. at the Cobequid Community Health Centre (note new location), 40 Freer Lane (opposite Zinck on Cobequid Road), Lower Sackville. For more information, please call Jack at 902-864-5064. You can also visit the website at www.cpcn.org

 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

 The National Ovarian Cancer Association invites all women's groups, organizations or smaller groups of women to host a free presentation at their place of business, worship, or home, on a potential lifesaving topic. The "Listen to the Whispers" program, presented by trained volunteers, teaches well women the warning signs of ovarian cancer. There is NO test to detect this disease, and "knowledge is power". A training program is also available to individuals interested in becoming volunteers in the "Listen to the Whispers" program. For more information, call toll free 1-866-825-0788.