

Palliative Care Certification Benefits All



IN THIS ISSUE

Improving Cancer Patient Information

The Value of PSA Testing

Lifelong learning. Continuing education. Specialty certification. The commitment to continually enhance and improve your skill set. It requires dedication and perseverance, two attributes prevalent in health professionals including the 21 Nova Scotia nurses who earned their Hospice Palliative Care Certification during the inaugural exam, written in April of this year.

"Certification articulates the competencies expected of a nurse practicing in a designated specialty setting – in this case palliative care," said Judy Simpson, Coordinator of Supportive and Palliative Care with *Cancer Care Nova Scotia*, and a certified Hospice Palliative Care nurse. "As nurses, certification helps us feel more confident in our ability to detect signs and symptoms in our patients and enables us to initiate prompt interventions to meet their needs. In addition, employers also benefit from knowing the skill level they are getting in an individual who has certified specialty training."

Sheila D'Eon, a nurse with the Victorian Order of Nurses – Tri-County Branch, and Barbara Stewart, a Palliative Care Home Consultation Nurse with the Capital Health Integrated Palliative Care Service, also studied for and earned their certification in April. Each had similar reasons for enhancing their knowledge base.

"Palliative care is one of the most fulfilling areas of nursing," said Sheila. "I've learned so much from patients and families. I get back more than I give every time." Her deep commitment to her patients is one of the reasons Sheila decided to study for certification.

"Earning my certification has increased my confidence," she said. "I have a better knowledge base now. When someone is dying, they have needs other than just pain and symptom management. They have social, emotional and spiritual needs. The certification process has provided me with more of a comfort level in these areas."

A number of criteria must be met to qualify to write the certification exam. An individual must be a Registered Nurse working in palliative care, with at least 3900 hours of experience in the field within a five-year period. Applicants must also receive written endorsement from their employer.

Once a candidate is deemed qualified, they begin to prepare for the exam. Although there is no designated course, a study guide includes suggested readings and outlines competencies and tips for writing the exam. Practice exams are also provided to ensure applicants have a comfort level in the kinds of questions that will be asked. *(continued on p.2)*

Barbara Stewart, Palliative Care Home Consultation Nurse, Capital Health Integrated Palliative Care Service.



Palliative Care Certification Benefits All (cont'd)

In preparing to write the exam, Barbara read many of the suggested readings. She completed the sample exam, realized where the gaps were and studied those areas. She also found small study groups helpful and recommends a couple of websites: (the symptom management section of www.bccancer.bc.ca and www.virtualhospice.org).

Barbara says that while the certification process did require some focused study it is something she believes is valuable and recommends to others. "Palliative care certification means we are recognized as a specialty. The more nurses that become certified, the more interest there is in advancing the study of palliative care. Patients, in general, get better treatment if more people are skilled in providing end-of-life care."

"It's very much a privilege to walk with people through this very intimate time. It's amazing what people will tell us. They share wounds far beyond cancer and often we are able to help them heal as they die with cancer. It's really quite humbling. In earning certification, as specialty nurses we are doing our best to ensure we have the optimal skill level to meet our patients' needs."

The certification exam for Hospice Palliative Care is scheduled each year in April. The cost of certification is \$485. Although nurses are responsible to cover the cost, funding from a number of sources is available. To learn more about Hospice Palliative Care Certification, contact Judy Simpson at judy.simpson@ccns.nshealth.ca or call her at 902-473-3825.

Cancer Care Nova Scotia, through Judy Simpson, co-led the development of the Hospice and Palliative Care certification program.

Improving Cancer Patient Education By Laura Melanson

Complex diagnoses and staging procedures. Numerous treatment options. Countless side effects. Cancer is a complex disease unlike any other. It creates feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and fear in patients and their families.

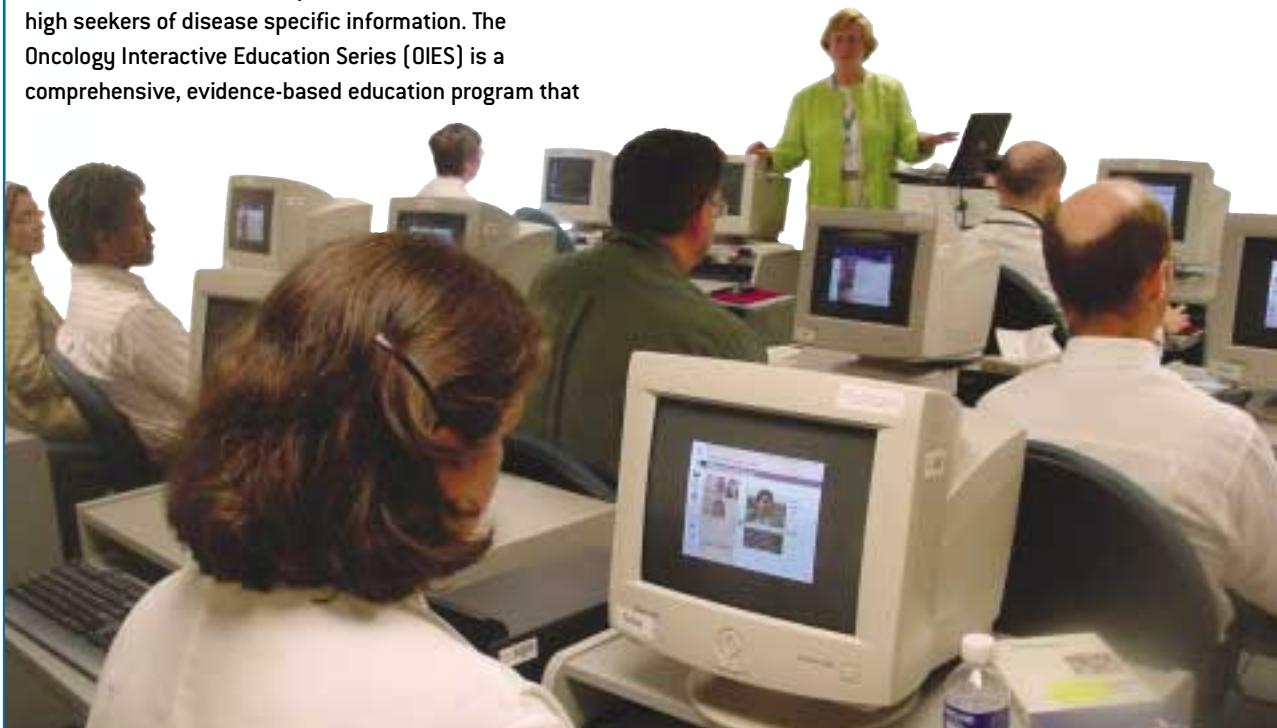
One of the most effective ways to combat these feelings is through patient education. Research indicates that when patients understand their disease, they are able to play a more active role in decisions about their treatment. The result is better outcomes and better care.

In Nova Scotia, cancer patients and their families are high seekers of disease specific information. The Oncology Interactive Education Series (OIES) is a comprehensive, evidence-based education program that

provides up-to-date cancer information to patients, their families and the health professionals who care for them.

"The more a patient understands about the complexities of cancer, the less anxious they are about it," said Sandra Cook, Project Manager for Patient Navigation and OIES. "The Oncology Interactive Education Series is improving access to consistent, quality cancer information. It will lead to a better understanding of the illness, better compliance with treatment, and ultimately better care." *(continued on p.3)*

Sandra Cook, Project Manager, Oncology Interactive Education Series (OIES) and Patient Navigation, demonstrates the comprehensive cancer information available through OIES.





Improving Cancer Patient Education (cont'd)

OIES is the first educational tool of its kind in Canada. An interactive and user-friendly computer software program, OIES has information on 24 types of cancer. Each title in the series contains between 18 and 25 hours of learning material. Patients, their families and health professionals are able to access information about early detection, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment options, pain management, community support services, answers to commonly asked questions and more.

OIES is designed to accommodate a range of learning styles, literacy levels and computer skills by incorporating three-dimensional anatomy diagrams, animation, patient interviews, and a glossary of terms in an easy-to-use format. Each title also includes information at a clinical level for family physicians and oncologists.

"OIES will complement the more traditional methods of education such as print material and one on one discussions between doctors and patients," said Sandra. "Its unique components, such as the animation, enable complex issues to be explained more easily."

Charlene Porter, Patient Navigator for Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority said that the program is improving her knowledge of different types of cancers.

"OIES has certainly been helpful to me in my role as Patient Navigator," she said. "The staff and volunteers here are really excited about using it. We all agree it is a much needed resource."

Cancer Care Nova Scotia has collaborated with the Capital Health Cancer Care Program, the Cape Breton Cancer Care Program, Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority, Pictou County Health Authority, South West Health and the Canadian Cancer Society's Lodge that Gives to pilot test OIES in six sites across the province. OIES volunteers are available at each of the six sites to help patients and their family members navigate the program.

OIES was developed by Jack Digital Productions in collaboration with the Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto. Nova Scotia is the first province to pilot test the program. An evaluation will be conducted to measure the use of OIES by patients, their families and health professionals. The evaluation will measure user satisfaction and will seek health professionals' opinions on how to most effectively use the program as part of the care process. The decision to implement OIES province-wide will be based on the evaluation results, which are expected to be available by June 2005.

The Value of PSA Testing

Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) testing has received mixed reviews recently in local and national newspapers, as a

result of research published in the October 2004 edition of the *Journal of Urology*.

The study was led by Thomas A. Stamey from the Department of Urology, School of Medicine, at Stanford University. Dr. Stamey, who is renowned for his work in prostate cancer research, and his team

reviewed the usefulness of PSA for screening for prostate cancer over the last 20 years at their centre.

They concluded that PSA testing should not be used as a screening tool for prostate cancer. However, they did note that PSA testing is important in diagnosing an enlarged prostate and as a marker to indicate whether a

patient is cured following a radical prostatectomy and/or after radiation treatment.



"There is a lot of confusion about the usefulness of PSA testing in men who are healthy," said Dr. Derek Wilke, radiation oncologist, Capital Health Cancer Care Program and Co-chair of *Cancer Care Nova Scotia's* Genito-urinary Cancer Site Team. "Really, the usefulness of the test as a screening tool depends on what you define as useful. The

number of men dying from prostate cancer has decreased in recent years. This may be due to PSA screening, which suggests that screening is a good thing. However, to date, organized PSA screening programs have not shown reductions in mortality from this disease."

(continued on p.4)

R E S E A R C H





Volume V, Issue Five /
November 2004

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
Heidi Smeltzer
1278 Tower Road
Bethune Building, Room 541
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 2Y9

Telephone: 902.473.2630
Toll-free: 1.866.599.2267
Facsimile: 902.473.4631
heidi.smeltzer@ccns.nshealth.ca

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 V, Issue Six is December 6, 2004.

Cancer Care Nova Scotia is a program of the Nova Scotia Department of Health.

© Crown Copyright, Province of Nova Scotia, 2004. May be reprinted with permission from *Cancer Care Nova Scotia* (1-866-599-2267).

Dr. Wilke adds that PSA screening is not a perfect test and says that an elevated PSA does not always mean cancer. With an elevated PSA patients are referred to a urologist for further testing. So, what do men need to know? *Cancer Care Nova Scotia's* official position is that the early detection of prostate cancer requires a partnership between Nova Scotia men and their physicians. Men who are over 50 should discuss the potential benefits of screening with their doctor. In many cases, men will choose to pursue PSA testing in case early detection can increase the chance for cure.

Those with a close family relative (father, brother, uncle, grandfather) who has had prostate cancer or men of African heritage are considered to be at increased

risk. Screening for these men should begin at 40. This is also an issue for men who do not know their family histories. Of course men who experience symptoms of prostate cancer (frequent, difficult or painful urination; dribbling urine; blood or pus in the urine; pain in the lower back, pelvic area or upper thighs; painful ejaculation) should have a full urological examination including a PSA test and digital rectal examination.

The debate about the value of PSA testing for screening will most likely continue; however, medical experts do agree that PSA testing is an excellent tool for men who have been diagnosed with prostate cancer. It is helpful in choosing the best treatment option, assessing the response of treatment and in detecting recurrences.

News and Notes

Cancer Care Nova Scotia is pleased to extend congratulations to a number of individuals:

Dr. Ronald MacCormick, Medical Director, Cape Breton Cancer Centre, who recently received the prestigious R. M. Taylor Medal and Award for 2004. Sponsored by the Canadian Cancer Society and its research partner, the National Cancer Institute of Canada, the R. M. Taylor Medal and Award recognizes outstanding achievements in the cancer field. Dr. MacCormick was instrumental in bringing full cancer services to Cape Breton - first developing a medical oncology unit, and later a regional cancer centre.

Dr. Oscar Shiu-Yuet Wong, a retired radiation oncologist who worked at the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre, was recently named a recipient of the Order of Nova Scotia for 2004. Dr. Wong was a founding member and president of the Chinese Society of Nova Scotia, a board member of the Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association and founding member and director of the Canada/Hong Kong Business Association.

Tressie Dutchyn, Coordinator, Atlantic Provinces Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Network (APHON), was recently awarded a Psychosocial Oncology Research Training (PORT) graduate level fellowship. PORT is a new and innovative research training initiative that links Canada's top psychosocial oncology researchers across a variety of disciplines and four universities.

Members of the Communications Office with Dalhousie's Faculty of Medicine recently received two Amethyst Merit Awards and one Amethyst Gemstone Award for MegaSearch. The publication is a cartoon

format health research bulletin designed to introduce grade five students to health research happening at Dalhousie Medical School. The awards were presented by the Canadian Public Relations Society (Nova Scotia Chapter) in recognition of best overall public relations programs within the profession. MegaSearch has three major sponsors: *Cancer Care Nova Scotia*, the Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation and the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation.

This month *CCNS* also has much to be proud of. We want to congratulate and recognize those who have excelled and been recognized by their peers for their recent accomplishments.

Donna Smith, Patient Navigation Community Liaison; **Judy Purcell**, Prevention Coordinator; and **Margery MacIsaac**, Coordinator of the Gynaecological Cancer Screening Program, were awarded first place for their poster in the cancer prevention education category at the conference for the American Association for Cancer Education. The poster was titled, "Increasing Cancer Education Through Lay Educators in an African Nova Scotian Community."

Cancer Care Nova Scotia's Communications Office received an Amethyst Merit Award from the Canadian Public Relations Society (Nova Scotia chapter) for the Pap Test Awareness Week communications strategy, "A Simple Test Could Save Your Life." The purpose of the campaign is to educate and raise awareness among women about the importance of regular Pap tests in preventing cervical cancer.