

Excellence in Cancer Patient Care



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South West Health will celebrate a milestone in cancer care this spring. With funding from the Department of Health and the Yarmouth Regional Hospital Foundation which includes community support through proceeds from the sale of calendars featuring local lobster fishermen, the district will soon be home to a new cancer centre.

"The cancer care program has grown steadily over the past few years," says Darolyn Walker, Cancer Patient Navigator, South West Health. "We've experienced real progress in every area of cancer care. The services we provide in an effort to meet patients' needs continue to grow."

Aside from a cancer patient navigator, South West Health offers surgical cancer services. As well, cancer patients can also receive care in the district's satellite oncology clinics. These clinics are under the direction of a visiting medical oncologist and a radiation oncologist and have been recently expanded with the support of the Department of Health and *Cancer Care Nova Scotia*. Through these clinics, many cancer patients are able to have consults and follow-up care in their home district.

A comprehensive review of cancer services earlier this year by *Cancer Care Nova Scotia* indicated that South West Health is meeting high standards of care which are comparable to services available at the province's two cancer centres.

The quality of their cancer services are being

recognized by others well. The cancer program was a shining star during the district's recent accreditation survey. This prompted the team to form a District Cancer Program Steering Committee to focus on cancer care as a whole from health promotion to early detection, treatment, survivorship and bereavement.

This holistic approach to cancer treatment and care means that patients and families not only benefit from seeing cancer specialists and a patient navigator in their home district, they also have access to a multi-disciplinary care team of health professionals such as nurses, dieticians, social workers, respiratory therapists, home oxygen, physio and occupational therapists and palliative care specialists, among others. Dr. Karma Murphy, *(continued on following page)*



L-R: Ms. Darolyn Walker,
Cancer Patient Navigator;
Ms. Cathy Blades,
Clinical Vice President

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a general practitioner with an interest and expertise in oncology, is also part of the team. As well, two pharmacy technicians have completed CCNS's new on-line chemotherapy preparation program. They will support the pharmacological teaching component of the cancer program.

In addition to formal district cancer services, and local cancer patient support groups, patients are able to participate in various volunteer community support programs like "Look Good. Feel Better", a monthly workshop that addresses appearance issues related to cancer and its side effects.

"There is a lot of emotional stress in dealing with cancer, including financial worries and fear," says Darolyn. "It's a tremendous benefit for our patients to know they can turn to us, find the knowledge and support they need, close to home. We want to help patients and families following their cancer diagnosis."

Of course, South West health professionals also benefit through the evolution of cancer services. As the district's Clinical Vice President Cathy Blades, explains, "By working together, the local cancer care team can deliver more efficient care and learn from a

network of information sharing and feedback. In turn, patient outcomes improve and cancer specialists gain greater confidence in the local team. District administrators are also providing greater support by promoting the area's services and by working to ensure patients continue to have access to the care they need.

Cathy also says the *Cancer Care Nova Scotia* team has been a huge asset, serving as visionary leaders in moving cancer care forward. "From launching top-notch provincial programs to setting standards and providing day-to-day expertise, *Cancer Care Nova Scotia* has made us feel like we are all in this together," she says.

Although the new cancer centre promises many benefits, Cathy says, "The synergies we'll gain from having our people and services in one place will build momentum for better care. After all, it's not enough to just train as a team, it's through working as a team that you really see the benefits."

"We're really excited as we move forward with the ongoing development of our cancer program. In short, the evolution continues and perhaps the best is yet to come!"

Meeting your Communication Needs

"Are we doing the right things and if yes, are those things being done right?" This question could apply to just about anything. In this particular case it was applied to communications. *Cancer Care Nova Scotia* worked with a communications firm to find out if our organization is providing you with the kind of information you need when you need it.

We are pleased that so many participated in interviews and responded to our surveys. We learned a great deal about what is working on the communication front from your perspective and ideas for improving how to keep you informed.

In general, we learned that we are doing a lot of things right, but often many feel overwhelmed by the amount of information we share. Many people said they'd appreciate bite-sized pieces of information, with the option to access more, depending on the topic. We learned that our website has lots of valuable information, but that it could be better organized. We also learned that face-to-face communication,

while challenging and sometimes not possible, is valued most by both our internal and external stakeholders.

Over the coming months, we will be working to change the way we communicate to better meet your needs. First on the list is a facelift for the CCNS newsletter. This issue marks our last four-page newsletter. In January, we will be moving to a combination print / electronic newsletter. The articles will be short with Web links to more information on the topic should it be of interest to you. At the same time, we're working to improve our website so it's easier for you to find the information that you need when you need it. We'll also work to find opportunities to meet with you face-to-face.

As we work to implement your suggestions to enable better communication, we'll be asking for your feedback. As always, we welcome your feedback at any time. Email your thoughts and ideas to info@ccns.nshealth.ca



Finding Lung Cancer Early—A National Study

At 49, Nancy Matthews, a former smoker, does not fit the typical profile of someone diagnosed with early stage lung cancer, but she is.

A smoker for 30 years, Nancy's doctor sent her for a chest x-ray, which revealed a spot on her right lung. A subsequent CAT Scan confirmed the results and she had surgery to remove the tumour. Today, she is home recovering with the comfort of knowing she'll be regularly monitored for further changes.

"I must have had an angel on my side to catch it [cancer] in an x-ray," exclaims Nancy. "Being diagnosed with lung cancer was definitely a wake-up call."

Sadly, Nancy's experience is a rare 'good news' story. As the leading cause of cancer death in Canada and around the world, lung cancer kills 20,000 Canadians and 1.2 million people worldwide; more than colorectal, breast and prostate cancers combined. About 800 Nova Scotians are estimated to be diagnosed with the disease in 2008 and about the same number are predicted to die of the disease in the current year. Only about 16 per cent of lung cancer patients survive five years or more because they are diagnosed too late, when they present with symptoms. Thanks to a five-year, 'made-in-Canada', nationwide lung cancer detection study, these grim statistics may soon change.

Launched this fall by the Terry Fox Research Institute and the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, the study – which has undergone international peer review – will recruit 2,500 current and former smokers, between the ages of 50 and 75, in seven Canadian cities: Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, Quebec City and Halifax. Recruitment and initial testing is expected to occur in years one and two, after which participants will be monitored and further tested.

Dr. Michael Johnston, a Thoracic Surgeon with Capital Health, is principal investigator of the Halifax arm of the study. Together with co-investigator Dr. Daria Manos, a Radiologist and Study Coordinator Diana Sonnichsen, (both also from Capital Health) they plan to recruit 225 Atlantic Canadians.

Eligible individuals will participate in an in-depth telephone interview to document data such as family medical history, occupational exposure, the presence or absence of chronic obstructive lung disease, body height and weight, smoking history and age. This information will then be sent to experts in Vancouver for a risk assessment.

If the assessment indicates that the individual has a greater than two per cent chance of developing lung

cancer in the next three years, he/she will be accepted into the study. From there, participants will undergo a breathing test to measure lung capacity and a blood test to identify proteins that may indicate the presence of lung cancer. Participants will then receive a low dose CAT Scan and about half will also undergo a bronchoscopy.

"The Canadian study builds on current and past international trials," explains Dr. Manos, "but is unique in that it combines low cost, readily accessible screening tests with costlier but more sensitive techniques. Also, it's bringing together top Canadian experts in radiology, respiratory medicine, thoracic surgery, pathology, oncology, epidemiology, health economics and health care policy, and that's very exciting."

The study will also leverage the results of two large randomized trials currently underway in the United States and Europe. However, Dr. Johnston explains that the Canadian study is more refined, in that it's examining a smaller, high risk group in hopes of being able to help more people. "If lung cancer is diagnosed and treated before it spreads, the five-year survival is over 70 percent," he said. "And, this is the most promising strategy."

"At the end of the study we will know if this is an effective method to screen for lung cancer," says Dr. Manos. If the study's approach is positive, the practice could be adopted in a public health care setting, similar to mammograms and Pap tests.

Nancy Matthews believes she is living proof that early detection for lung cancer works. As such, she highly recommends regular medical check-ups and early screening, especially for those who smoke, adding: "It's helped me to breathe a whole lot easier."

Current and former smokers between the age of 50 and 75 who are interested in participating should call the study registration line at 1-888-505-8374.

L-R: Dr. Daria Manos,
Radiologist;
Dr. Michael Johnston,
Thoracic Surgeon (both
with Capital Health)



Online Chemo Program Celebrates First Graduates

Graduation is an exciting moment for students and instructors alike. However, that excitement quickly transcends to pure jubilation when you're part of a successful, ground-breaking experience. Such was the case on September 9, 2008, when 20 pharmacy technicians became the first graduates of *Cancer Care Nova Scotia's* Online Chemotherapy Program.

"This is my big success of the year," remarks a proud Larry Broadfield, *Cancer Care Nova Scotia's* (CCNS) Manager of Systemic Therapy. Dylana Arsenault-Thompkins, Director of Pharmacy Services for Annapolis Valley Health agrees, calling it "monumental". "Let there be no doubt that we are being watched by the entire country," she said. "Right now, all eyes are on us. We are forging the path that many will replicate and emulate and that is worth taking pause."

Developed as a pilot project through a partnership of CCNS and the Nova Scotia Community College, the online program was offered to pharmacy technicians across the province, whose job included preparing chemotherapy medication.

The college worked with the *Cancer Care Nova Scotia* team and a provincial working group to develop the course to help standardize methods used for chemotherapy preparation. Instruction includes online discussions and quizzes, as well as exercises for practicing skills such as using saline solution to simulate the preparation of chemotherapy medications. Students also traveled to the NSCC Waterfront Campus for a one-day, face-to-face meeting to test their skills in

the pharmacy technician labs.

"Chemotherapy preparation is a complex procedure involving very stringent protocols," explains Larry. "The drugs are highly toxic, so technicians must be well-versed and skilled to perform their duties while maintaining safety standards."

The first group of graduates completed the 12-week program and participated in an online graduation ceremony on September 9th, with districts joining in via Telehealth.

A new group of pharmacy technicians began the course in mid-September. By the end of the project in

April, 80 students will have completed the training. It will also be provided to new pharmacy technicians as they enter the workforce.

"The chemotherapy preparation course is one in a series of skills-based education programs we're designing for cancer health professionals,"



L-R: Larry Broadfield, Manager of Systemic Therapy, CCNS; Kelly Robinson, Chief Pharmacy Technician, Capital Health

said Anne Murray, CCNS's Provincial Manager, Education and Patient Navigation. "Through programs like chemotherapy preparation, *Cancer Care Nova Scotia* is ensuring health professionals continue to have the necessary skills to provide their cancer patients with safe, high-quality care."

In short, safety, efficiency and practicality combined to create a chemotherapy preparation course that not only benefitted the participants and therefore, the patients they serve, but also the District Health Authorities who received needed assistance in meeting expected standards.

Skills for Healing Retreat

A skills for healing retreat will be held November 28-30 in Halifax. Presenters include Dr. Rob Rutledge, Radiation Oncologist and Tim Walker, Psychotherapist.

Participants will learn stress reduction techniques, gain an understanding of mind body spirit connection and the benefits of meditation.

The retreat is free for cancer patients and a family member, but a deposit is required. Bursaries are available to cover travel and childcare expenses.

For information call 902-425-4848 or visit www.robrutledge.ca