

# A Step Closer

## Update on the Summer 2008 Opening of BC Cancer Agency's Abbotsford Centre

### Cancer journey includes emotional healing

Joy Konyonenbelt, a 39 year old Abbotsford resident, discovered she had thyroid cancer last year. Ten months after receiving five weeks of intense radiation treatment to her throat and upper body cavity, she still feels exhausted most days, but she is slowly recovering. Also on the mend are her spirit, and her joy for living.

“When you’re hit with a cancer diagnosis, it stops you in your tracks,” says Joy. “You want to believe you’ll be okay, but your thoughts keep going back and forth and you think what if I’m not?”

The BC Cancer Agency’s Patient and Family Counselling Service helps patients like Joy cope with a diagnosis of cancer and to find information about community and financial resources. Patients can access support individually, as a couple, family or in support groups. Research shows that about forty percent of all cancer patients experience significant emotional distress at some point in their cancer journey.

“Over the course of a cancer diagnosis, patients lose their certainty in life,” says Gregory Huebner, a counsellor for the BC Cancer Agency’s Abbotsford Centre. “They lose their financial certainty as many patients experience a decline in income; they lose their emotional certainty, and they lose their certainty of life meaning which has formed the core of their being. As a counsellor, my goal is to help patients gain perspective and re-establish avenues of hope.”

The program is innovative in its approach to offering evidence-based programs guided by community need. “We’ll begin by offering counselling and stress reduction programs,” says Gina MacKenzie, head of Patient and Family Counselling Services for the Lower Mainland. “But, many of those programs will evolve based on what the community tells us would be helpful.”

One pioneering approach is piloting on-line support groups, which are counsellor-led. “There are people, for many different reasons, who may be reluctant to join a support group, or to see a counsellor face-to-face, or perhaps they’re unable because of physical limitations. An on-line group, led by a qualified counsellor, who can respond to questions or help guide discussion, may be a valuable alternative.”

However patients access services, the end goal is the same: to alleviate the anxiety and stress cancer patients face.

**Resources for coping with cancer are listed on the Agency’s website. For more information, please visit [www.bccancer.bc.ca](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca).**



*Gina MacKenzie, head of Patient and Family Counselling Service for the Lower Mainland and Gregory Huebner, a clinical counsellor at the new BC Cancer Agency's Abbotsford Centre.*

### Public Open House

10:00 am - 4:00 pm

Saturday, June 14

Abbotsford Regional  
Hospital and Cancer Centre  
32900 Marshall Road,  
Abbotsford, BC

## BC Cancer Agency's Hereditary Cancer Program finds permanent home in Abbotsford

The BC Cancer Agency's Hereditary Cancer Program is expanding with the addition of a new, permanent office at the Abbotsford Regional Hospital and Cancer Centre.

Services are currently provided at fixed sites in Vancouver and Victoria, with genetic counsellors and medical geneticists providing outreach clinics to community hospitals throughout the province.

"The demographics showed that about two-thirds of our referrals are now coming from the Fraser Valley," says Jenna Scott, clinical coordinator for BC Cancer Agency's Hereditary Cancer Program. "We wanted to make it as convenient as possible for patients to access services, and the opening of the new centre was a perfect opportunity to expand the service in the Fraser Valley."

"By having a regular, physical presence in the Fraser Valley, we can further develop relationships with doctors, nurses, and other health care providers in the community who can help identify those at high risk."

Cancer is largely a disease of aging; about 70 percent of all cancers are found in people who are 60 or older. However, five to 10 percent of cancers are known to be hereditary, or related to a specific gene mutation that is passed down in a family.

The BC Cancer Agency's Hereditary Cancer Program helps families identified as potentially having a gene mutation to make informed decisions about genetic testing; educates families about available treatments or options to reduce cancer risk; and provides screening recommendations for individuals at high-risk.

"Genetic counsellors help individuals through difficult decision-making. There's far too much information for patients to sift through on their own. The choices, and risk/benefit ratios of various options change over time," says Caitlin Springate, a genetic counsellor hired for the Abbotsford Centre. "New genes may emerge and we may be able to offer families new testing, or new research may become available that changes recommendations for screening."

**For more information about the BC Cancer Agency's Hereditary Cancer Program, please visit our website at [www.bccancer.bc.ca](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca).**

An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, the BC Cancer Agency provides a comprehensive cancer control program for the people of B.C., including prevention, screening, early detection, research, education, care and treatment. The Abbotsford Regional Hospital and Cancer Centre (ARHCC), a partnership with the Fraser Health Authority, is the Agency's fifth cancer centre. The BC Cancer Foundation raises funds to support research and enhancements to patient care at the BC Cancer Agency.

#### Our Mission:

- Reduce the incidence of cancer
- Reduce the mortality from cancer; and
- Improve the quality of life for those living with cancer

For the latest BC Cancer Agency Abbotsford updates, visit [www.bccancer.bc.ca](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca)



*Jenna Scott, clinical coordinator for the BC Cancer Agency's Hereditary Cancer Program.*



**BC Cancer Agency**

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