

A Step Closer

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

Dietitians: helping patients overcome nutritional challenges

It is not uncommon for cancer patients to need double the calories and protein than that of a healthy person. Combined with side effects caused by cancer or cancer treatment – including nausea, poor appetite, dry mouth, difficulty chewing and swallowing, diarrhea, constipation, and a change in taste buds – it can make being well-nourished very challenging.

“Fifty to 80 percent of cancer patients will experience some level of malnutrition, but 100 percent will have nutrition questions or concerns,” says Diane Matergio, Regional Professional Practice Leader for Oncology Nutrition.

“Food is a very basic human need,” explains Diane. “The role of dietitians at the BC Cancer Agency is to help patients prevent or minimize malnutrition which, in turn, means a shorter recovery period and decreased need for hospitalization, intravenous hydration, and treatment interruptions.”

About 75 percent of patients seen by dietitians at the Agency are undergoing radiation therapy and because of its unique side effects, dietitians have acquired specialized knowledge in the nutrition care of patients in this area.

BC Cancer Agency dietitians are leaders in developing national oncology standards and clinical practice guidelines, as well as leaders in cancer survivorship and oncology nutrition research.

Dietitians meet with cancer patients to determine their nutritional goals, to provide practical suggestions to meet those goals, and to provide follow-up care and support until they are back on their “dietary” feet. Dietitians also meet with family members to educate them on how best to feed their loved ones. “It’s extremely difficult to watch someone you love not be able to eat,” says Diane.

“Patients and their families often experience fear and anxiety about food and eating at the time of their diagnosis. BC Cancer Agency dietitians can help alleviate that fear and anxiety by providing reassurance and being reliable sources of information about diet and cancer.”



Diane Matergio, Regional Professional Practice Leader for Oncology Nutrition at the BC Cancer Agency's Fraser Valley and Abbotsford Centres

Dial-A-Dietitian

Dial-A-Dietitian (DAD) is a free nutrition information line that provides British Columbians with brief consultations on any general nutrition inquiries over the phone, and can help make referrals to hospital outpatient dietitians, community nutritionists or other nutrition services in the community.

In the spring of 2007, the BC Cancer Agency oncology nutrition program partnered with DAD to train a dietitian to answer basic oncology questions. Cancer patients who require intensive nutrition counselling will be referred to the Agency.

To contact DAD, call toll free in B.C. at 1.800.667.3438

Pain and symptom management: improving quality of life for patients

Cancer patients will often experience some level of pain during treatment. To help improve quality of life for those living with cancer, the BC Cancer Agency is constantly seeking and improving new treatment options for managing pain.

The BC Cancer Agency's Pain and Symptom Management/Palliative Care (PSMPC) Program is dedicated to helping cancer patients improve pain control and cope with symptoms by taking part in various types of research and applying their knowledge into best practices.

"We use a combination of medications to manage different cancer-related symptoms," says Elizabeth Cooper, Pain and Symptom Clinic Nurse. "The Program focuses heavily on teaching patients about the types of medication available to them."

The PSMPC Program's Symptom Management Team – consisting of a physician, nurse, pharmacist, counsellor, and dietitian – meets with patients and their families to review their physical, social, and emotional concerns to develop an individualized plan that may involve medication, or alternative methods such as acupuncture or massage.

"It's a team approach that we use, and these are experts in their field who want to help cancer patients deal with their symptoms, whether or not their cancer is palliative or non-palliative," explains Elizabeth. "Our job is to assess and follow-up with every patient until we find the best treatment plan that works for them."

In addition to educating patients on pain and symptom management, the PSMPC Program conducts community meetings with family doctors.

"Majority of the patients seen by the Symptom Management Team are referred by oncologists and nurses who work at the BC Cancer Agency," says Elizabeth. "But we also want to raise awareness among physicians in the community so that they have the information to make necessary referrals to our program."

At the new BC Cancer Agency's Abbotsford Centre, the PSMPC Program will also be collaborating with the Fraser Health Authority in managing palliative care, an integrative approach to improving the quality of life for patients.

"We are here to help patients with their cancer-related symptoms," says Elizabeth. "We want to ensure that each patient's quality of life is the best that it can be."



Elizabeth Cooper, Pain and Symptom Clinic Nurse at the BC Cancer Agency's Fraser Valley Centre



Abbotsford Regional Hospital and Cancer Centre opens August 24

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.

Our Mission:

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

BC Cancer Foundation

The BC Cancer Foundation raises and stewards resources to support breakthrough research and compassionate care through the BC Cancer Agency.

For more information, visit www.bccancerfoundation.com or call toll free in B.C. at **1.888.906.CURE**

For the latest BC Cancer Agency's Abbotsford Centre updates, visit www.bccancer.bc.ca