

A Step Closer

BC Cancer Agency's Abbotsford Centre ready for patients August 25

Abbotsford Centre staff ready for first day of patient care

While the first day of patient care at the Abbotsford Centre on August 25 could very well be compared to a marathon runner nearing the finish line, Chief Physician Dr. Frances Wong thinks otherwise.

"A finish line implies that it's over," says Dr. Wong. "When the Abbotsford Centre begins patient care on August 25, it's not an ending, but the beginning of expanding a cancer control program, which is renowned throughout the world, into one of the fastest growing areas in the province."

"It's also the beginning of new collaborations and relationships with our colleagues at the hospital and in the community."

"I prefer to think of it as the opening night of a new ballet," says Dr. Wong. "You've worked hard for months, maybe years, and finally you get a chance to show off what you've accomplished in front of an audience. But, the effort isn't of one person, but of everyone involved in the production from the dancers, the choreographer, the musicians, the set designers, through to the director. Each night you have an opportunity to improve just a little bit more, to do just a bit better."

There's no doubt Abbotsford Centre staff are ready for their big day. The first wave of staff moved into the centre in July, and the rest will move in August. While you might expect a certain level of anxiety with August 25 just a few days away, Dr. Wong says that's not the case. "The more prepared you are, the calmer you are," she says. "Things are coming to fruition, and that's due to the high degree of preparedness and expertise of our staff."

Patients who are receiving radiation and chemotherapy on the first day will have had their treatment planning completed at the Fraser Valley Centre before August 25, so the high-tech radiation and chemotherapy equipment won't be sitting idle the first day. Patients will also be able to access support services such as patient and family counselling, nutritional counselling and pain and symptom management.

The Agency's Library staff have already catalogued 50 boxes of oncology journals and books, and they are now populating the shelves with the new materials. The centre and hospital meeting rooms are equipped with state-of-the-art technology and videoconferencing equipment, so Agency staff will be well-connected with their colleagues from throughout the province.

At full capacity, staff will treat 2,500 patients a year. In addition to core and support services, the centre will be home of an expanded Hereditary Cancer Program, and will offer brachytherapy, a specialized treatment for prostate and gynecological cancer patients.



Dr. Frances Wong, chief physician for the BC Cancer Agency's Fraser Valley and Abbotsford Centres.

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Dr. Frances Wong

Home-town girl nabs dream job

Liz Harris is a home-town girl, who's been living in the community since 1992.

Ten years ago after hearing the buzz about a new hospital being built in Abbotsford, Liz's dad told her that she needed to be part of the project.

"I was like, 'sure Dad'," Liz laughs. "I had just graduated from the University College of the Fraser Valley, with a major in psychology and a minor in history, and didn't have much fundraising experience, other than a co-op position at the United Way."

But, sometimes Dads just know better. Ten years later, Liz is working at her dream job as a development officer for the BC Cancer Foundation's Abbotsford Centre.

"My role is to support the mission of the BC Cancer Agency to prevent cancer, improve outcomes through research, and to improve the quality of life of patients and families who are living with the disease," says Liz.

"When people come to me and ask how they can support cancer research or patient care, we find the best way, based on their interests and values, to do that."

Liz, like many others, has a personal connection to cancer. "Cancer touches one in three people. My father-in-law was diagnosed with cancer, and a close friend died from cancer. I plan to keep raising money, until cancer doesn't exist anymore."

There's a tremendous amount of support and anticipation in the community for the new hospital and cancer centre. "The most asked question from the people I meet is, 'when is the hospital and cancer centre going to open? And, why can't it open earlier?'"

If you'd like to learn more about how you can support the new BC Cancer Agency's Abbotsford Centre, please call Liz Harris at 604.851.4736 or e-mail lharris3@bccancer.bc.ca



Liz Harris (right), development officer, BC Cancer Foundation, with Paris Ann Gfeller-Ingledew (left), radiation oncologist, BC Cancer Agency's Abbotsford Centre. Donor support provides radiation oncology residents with an opportunity to seek further education abroad and bring those skills back to B.C. for the benefit of BC Cancer Agency patients.

The BC Cancer Foundation

As the BC Cancer Agency's fundraising arm, the BC Cancer Foundation supports a broad range of the Agency's activities throughout the province – from basic and clinical research to primary prevention and patient enhancements to care. Over the past five years, thanks to the generosity of donors, this support has grown by over 50 percent to almost \$20 million in funding to the BC Cancer Agency, this past fiscal year.

The BC Cancer Agency

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

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Liz Harris

New brachytherapy suite opens

With the opening of a new procedure room at the Abbotsford Centre, for the first time Fraser Valley prostate and cervical cancer patients will have access to a specialized outpatient radiation therapy treatment, including planning, implants and follow-up care all at one centre in Abbotsford.

Called 'brachytherapy,' this is a specialized treatment using a radioactive source implanted or inserted close to cancerous tumours to shrink or kill them. The primary advantage of brachytherapy is the ability to deliver high-dose radiation to a targeted area while minimizing damage to healthy tissue.

It is particularly beneficial in treating solid tumours like those found in the prostate and cervix. And, when the tumour has not spread outside the prostate, the success rate for brachytherapy is comparable to more invasive surgical procedures.

For cervix patients, radioactive pellets are inserted through an applicator, which is removed after each treatment. However, the procedure was performed over two days, requiring patients to stay overnight stay in the hospital. Now, a new high-dose rate radiation therapy machine purchased for the Abbotsford Centre dramatically cuts treatment time to just a few hours so it can be done as an outpatient procedure.

"Brachytherapy is a specialized procedure and is usually a more effective treatment if cancer is localized," explains Dr. Wong. "A patient's oncologist will recommend a treatment based on the individual's unique medical circumstance."



Erin Robinson with the BC Cancer Agency's Radiation Therapy program inputs patient information into an ultrasound machine before a brachytherapy procedure. The Abbotsford Centre will be home to this specialized service.



Sonia Lamont with the BC Cancer Agency's Prevention Program says you can make small changes, like going for a walk at lunch, to reduce cancer risk. That's the message community prevention coordinators are also delivering throughout the province.

An ounce of prevention

"You're never too young to begin learning about how to prevent cancer," says Sonia Lamont with the BC Cancer Agency's Prevention Programs.

That's why Community Prevention Coordinators from throughout the province are working with daycares and schools to promote the healthy living message through the Agency's Sun Safe Daycare/Preschool and Healthy Living Schools programs.

Getting the prevention message out is more important than ever, according to Sonia. "People are living longer and the younger population tends to be not as healthy as those of previous generations at the same age, which is mainly due to poor lifestyle choices."

The coordinators – working with community partners – and using proven strategies to change behaviour, focus on the primary risk factors for cancer: smoking, sun, healthy body weight, inactivity, and diet.

But, you don't have to be young to reap the rewards of a healthy lifestyle, says Sonia. "Start off by making small changes, like going for a quick walk after dinner. Every change you make towards living a healthy lifestyle decreases your risk of getting cancer and other diseases."

To learn more about the Agency's Prevention Programs, supported by the BC Cancer Foundation, please visit the Agency's website at www.bccancer.bc.ca, or call 604.877.6227.

"Every change you make towards living a healthy lifestyle decreases your risk of getting cancer and other diseases."

Sonia Lamont

About the BC Cancer Agency...

- 1938** The BC Cancer Institute opens in the former Vancouver General Hospital Intern's residence.
- 1945** The provincial government provides funds for the first x-ray machine. By 1949, the Institute operates four x-ray machines.
- 1949** An organized cervical screening program to detect cancer of the cervix at an early stage is launched. It is an international model for early detection programs
- 1951** A treatment clinic opens at Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria.
- 1974** The B.C. Cancer Institute enters into an agreement with the province to establish the Cancer Control Agency of British Columbia (renamed the BC Cancer Agency). It operates the Vancouver and Victoria treatment centres.
- 1979** The BC Cancer Research Centre opens. Scientists conduct ground-breaking research to discover what causes cancer, how to improve cancer treatments, and how to develop better ways to control and cure the disease.
- 1988** The Screening Mammography Program (SMP) is established to reduce breast cancer mortality through early detection.
- 1995** The Fraser Valley Centre opens on the site of the Surrey Memorial Hospital.
- 1996** The BC Cancer Agency and the BC Provincial Medical Genetics Program



Sumas Wing of the Abbotsford Regional Hospital and Cancer Centre where the new BC Cancer Agency's Abbotsford Centre is located.

- 1998** establish the Hereditary Cancer Program to provide information and genetic counselling for individuals and families with a strong history of cancer.
- 1998** The Agency's Centre for the Southern Interior opens in Kelowna.
- 1999** The BC Cancer Agency establishes the first Genome Sciences Centre dedicated to finding the causes and cures for cancer. It is headed by the late Nobel Laureate Dr. Michael Smith.
- 2001** The BC Cancer Agency's Vancouver Island Centre opens.
- 2005** The Agency's new \$95-million cancer research facility opens in Vancouver. One of the largest free-standing cancer research facilities in Canada, it is home to nine specialty labs, including the renowned Terry Fox Laboratory.
- 2008** The BC Cancer Agency's fifth regional cancer centre and the second in the Fraser Valley, the Abbotsford Centre, opens August 25.

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BC Cancer Agency

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