



NEWS RELEASE

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Provincial Health Services Authority
BC Cancer Agency
Northern Health
University of Northern BC

Northern cancer survivorship care study already having positive effect

Prince George – Patients who receive a clean bill of health following successful cancer treatment often need resources to deal with the emotional aftermath - a challenge for those living in remote communities.

Access to physicians and counsellors is limited for the approximately 10,500 cancer survivors living in northern BC, leaving many to feel alone while they navigate their road to recovery.

A pilot test funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada is attempting to change that by studying the unique needs of survivors in eight communities across the north.

The \$213,054 grant has allowed scientists to complete the first phase of research, which was to meet cancer survivors and healthcare staff in the north, to inform the creation of care plans to better support patients post-treatment.

A First Nations-specific plan has also been developed in consultation with four First Nations communities that participated in the study and provided insight into culturally-specific needs.

The second phase of the study is currently ongoing, with preliminary results indicating patients and providers feel the plans have positively impacted their care.

Survivorship care plans are tools to help cancer survivors in their journey post-treatment. The care plans developed through the study include: information on medical history and follow-up guidelines; potential side effects and late effects to watch for; healthy living recommendations and other resources specific to cancer survivors in northern BC.

A feature of the survivorship care plans includes a large focus on self-management, giving patients the tools to access accurate information and responsive resources within the health care system. The plans also assist oncologists in urban centres in providing guidance to physicians and nurses in more rural locations.

Wrap-up of the full study is expected by the end of 2012, after which the care plans are expected to be distributed to clinics across Northern BC.

Quotes:

Shirley Bond, Prince George-Valemount MLA

"The investments that we have made over the last ten years have been designed to enhance cancer care services in the north and allow cancer patients to receive their treatment closer to home surrounded by family and friends. This research grant will give us the insight we need to provide appropriate support to cancer survivors in their recovery recognizing the unique challenges they may face as a result of living in Northern BC."

Pat Bell, Prince George-Mackenzie MLA

"Research is the foundation for finding new and better ways to deliver care, and improving patient outcomes. Ongoing cancer research in the north will be crucial in helping our residents access the best of care in their own backyard."

John Rustad, Nechako Lakes MLA

"This research study will help the many cancer survivors living across the north, now and into the future, in pursuing and maintaining a better quality of life post-treatment."

Dr. Rob Olson, radiation oncologist, BC Cancer Agency and principal investigator for the study

"This research is crucial to improving care in Northern BC. It will empower communities to equip patients to live as strong survivors, fully aware and prepared for what the next phase of their journey entails."

Dr. Geoffrey Payne, acting vice-president research, University of Northern BC (UNBC)

"As research is extremely important for developing new treatments that will benefit cancer survivors, I am pleased to see the progress of this important project that will have significant long-term benefits for the patients of northern BC."

Fiona Walks, vice-president of safety, quality & supportive care, BC Cancer Agency

"Better understanding survivorship needs and then implementing tools and processes which will help patients across the province is a key initiative for the BC Cancer Agency. This project is an excellent example of the collaborative nature of the researchers and clinicians in the North. It is through these types of fulfilling relationships that we will be able use knowledge gained in the north to not only leverage optimal cancer care for northern patients, but also for those around the province."

Alice Christensen, nurse, Smithers Community Cancer Service

"In the pilot plan interviews I have participated in so far, each person has indicated that they needed and appreciated some personal follow up post treatment, and that this should be done with people who understood the treatment they had been through. All the patients liked the survivorship booklet, saying it would help to guide them and their doctor with follow up care."

About the Northern Cancer Survivorship Project

The project initiated in early 2011 and funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, is a joint partnership between the BC Cancer Agency, Northern Health, the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), and the University of British Columbia (UBC). Participating communities include Dawson Creek, Smithers, Terrace, and Vanderhoof; as well as Takla Landing, Tsay Keh village, and the Nisga'a and Hazelton regions.

The original research project was divided into two phases. Throughout 2011, the research team investigated the needs of Northern survivors through interviews with health care professionals and cancer survivors in the designated communities for phase one. Health professionals interviewed included representatives from the nutrition, vocation rehabilitation, nursing, general practice, and oncology (cancer) fields.

This year the project is focused on phase two, testing pilot survivorship care plans that were developed from the feedback in phase one. Testing these care plans, including a First Nations specific plan, is focused on determining the most appropriate ways of providing medical and practical support after active treatment is complete to survivors in rural and remote locations.

Investigators for the project include: Dr. Robert Olson, research lead for the Northern Cancer Control Strategy, assistant professor for the Northern Medical Program and first radiation oncologist hired for the new BC Cancer Agency Centre for the North; Dr. Amanda Ward; Pam Tobin, clinical project manager and Aboriginal Health consultant, Northern Cancer Control Strategy, BC Cancer Agency; Dr. Nadine Caron, oncology surgeon, Academic Physician in Surgery with the Northern Medical Program, and Associate Faculty with Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health; Dr. Fuchsia Howard and Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, both from the Faculty of Medicine, University of British Columbia (Vancouver, BC); and Dr. Christopher Longo, Center for Health Economics and Policy Analysis, McMaster University (Hamilton, ON).

The Northern Cancer Control Strategy

The Northern Cancer Control Strategy is a joint partnership between the BC Cancer Agency, Northern Health and the Provincial Health Services Authority. It is focused on enhancing the continuum of cancer services in the North, including prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, and supportive and palliative care.

The BC Cancer Agency, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, is committed to reducing the incidence of cancer, reducing the mortality from cancer, and improving the quality of life of those living with cancer. It provides a comprehensive cancer control program for the people of British Columbia by working with community partners to deliver a range of oncology services, including prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment, research, education, supportive care, rehabilitation and palliative care. For more information, visit www.bccancer.ca.

The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians. For more information, visit www.phsa.ca.

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