



It's Daffodil Month and the Canadian Cancer Society is debuting its daffodil lapel pin this year. I bought one for my daughter at Mr. Sub. Quite nice — designed to closely resemble the daffodil in the Canadian Cancer Societies logo, including a stopper at the end to prevent it from falling off, or jabbing your little one for that matter.

So what's the big deal? Why sit up and take notice when cancer takes the stage yet again?

The reasons are many. They start in our cells. It is cancer and it comes in many shapes, sizes and forms - breast, lung and prostate to name a few. Every single diagnosis affects more than just one person. Family, friends and relatives are all affected in the process and they all need help and support.

It's a frightening word — cancer that is. A word many of us have been dealt, or deal with on a daily basis. An estimated one out of four Canadians are expected to die from cancer. That's worth taking note. According to the Canadian Cancer Society, 40 per cent of Canadian women and 45 per cent of Canadian men will develop cancer at some point during their lifetimes. Prostate cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in Ontario, followed by breast cancer and colorectal cancer respectively. Nevertheless, lung cancer remains the leading cause of cancer death in Ontario.

For the most part, the risk of cancer increases with age. Forty-three per cent of new cancer cases and 61 per cent of cancer deaths will occur among those who are at least 70 years old. However, the young are not immune. I recall a friend in Grade 7 struggling with cancer — he survived. I lovingly embrace my 5 year old daughter who is living (happily I might add) with benign tumours on the nerves of her left hand. I am hopeful and ravenous for information. What are the chances of the tumours becoming malignant? Where do I turn for help?

For many residents of Muskoka, help is close to home. Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare has two oncology clinics — one at the Huntsville District Memorial Hospital Site and the other at the South Muskoka Memorial Hospital Site in Bracebridge.

"These clinics provide ongoing education and chemotherapy services," said Catherine Racine, Manager, Emergency and Oncology Services. "It's important to be able to receive cancer care as close to home as possible, eliminating lengthy drives and the possible need for accommodation while away from home."

Chemotherapy is one of the three most common forms of cancer treatment. The others are surgery and radiation. Surgery removes the cancer while radiation directs an x-ray at the cancer. Both are relatively targeted forms of treatment. Chemotherapy, on the other hand, affects the entire body. It uses powerful drugs (delivered by mouth or injected with a needle into a vein, muscle or the cancerous area) to destroy cancer cells, shrink a tumour or for symptom management.

When an individual is diagnosed with cancer, their oncologist will establish an individualized treatment plan and refer them to the closest treatment centre possible.

"For members of our community who are prescribed chemotherapy, treatment is nearby. Our team is expert in drug administration and oncology processes," said Jody MacPherson, Chemotherapy Team Leader with Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare. "Generally speaking, treatment series may last from three months to two years and we have seen first hand the difference it makes in having a local chemotherapy clinic."

"If I had to go to Sudbury for treatment, I would definitely need to spend the night," said George Dickerson, resident of South River. "Being here is much better. The staff are phenomenal."

"We are blessed to have this service so close to home," added Clarence Holinshed, Huntsville Resident. "I have had 5 of my prescribed 14 treatments and find the staff to be very professional and friendly."

On average each year, the oncology clinics at Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare have over 1700 visits — that equates to 34 patients each week. While some individuals visit the clinic for treatments on a regular basis, others are equipped with a portable pump enabling them to self administer their treatment, returning only for care and pump maintenance.

Chances are you know someone facing cancer who needs your support. The important thing to remember is to listen, offer your assistance, and by all means, take the lead from the person you are trying to help.

Thank you Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare for being there.

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