

Summer 2001

CANCER Care

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the cancer care team
from across Ontario

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PEOPLE *who* care...

In regional cancer centres across Ontario, oncology professionals provide care and service to people who have been diagnosed with a variety of cancers. Caregivers are brought together into multidisciplinary teams—groups of highly skilled personnel from a range of cancer care specialties.

These teams include oncologists (physicians who have specialized in the medical, radiation and surgical treatment of cancer), radiation therapists, nurses, medical physicists, pharmacists, social workers and many others. By working in teams, they are able to provide patients with their collective knowledge and expertise in cancer care.

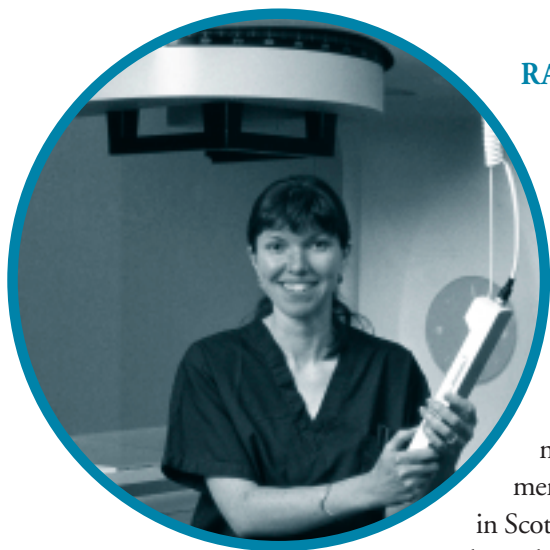
Across Canada and internationally, there is a shortage of oncology professionals. This shortage is considered by many to be the biggest challenge facing cancer care systems. Cancer Care Ontario has developed a comprehensive strategy to retain, recruit and train more oncology professionals. For an update on our human resource strategy, see page 9.

Our regional cancer centres also employ many staff behind the scenes in Health Records, Information Systems and other support services. Although patients may not come into direct contact with these employees, their work is essential to the provision of quality care and service, and to the smooth operation

of the cancer centres. A total of 2,500 staff are employed across the province by Cancer Care Ontario.

In this issue of *Cancer Care* magazine, we introduce readers to representatives of our multidisciplinary cancer care teams from the regional cancer centres in Windsor, London, Hamilton, Toronto, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Ottawa and Kingston. We hope that these short profiles provide some insight into the various professions that make up the multidisciplinary cancer care teams. We also hope you will enjoy learning about some of the people who provide cancer care for their fellow Ontarians.





RADIATION THERAPIST Anne Wighton, MRTT

When Anne Wighton says she likes working as a radiation therapist in Ontario cancer centres, it's a significant endorsement. Born and raised in Scotland, Anne trained at the Glasgow School of

Radiation Therapy and has worked as a radiation therapist in England, Holland, Singapore and at four Canadian cancer centres—three in the province of Ontario. For the past nine years, she has been on staff at Toronto-Sunnybrook Regional Cancer Centre. "I can say with a lot

of confidence that I like living and working in Ontario," Anne says. "The working conditions are excellent, both in terms of technology and quality patient care."

As a radiation therapist, Anne is trained in the planning and delivery of radiation therapy and the day-to-day care and education of patients with a variety of cancers. She finds her work with patients particularly rewarding and is impressed with the range of supportive care services available to Ontario cancer patients. Anne is also helping to break new ground by being among the first radiation therapists to be involved in clinical research.

When she was a teenager on holiday in Toronto, Anne saw her first radiation treatment machine at an Ontario Science Centre exhibit. Little did she know at the time that she would pursue a career as a radiation professional and work in a cancer centre only a few kilometres away.

MEDICAL PHYSICIST Tai Yeung, PhD, FCCPM

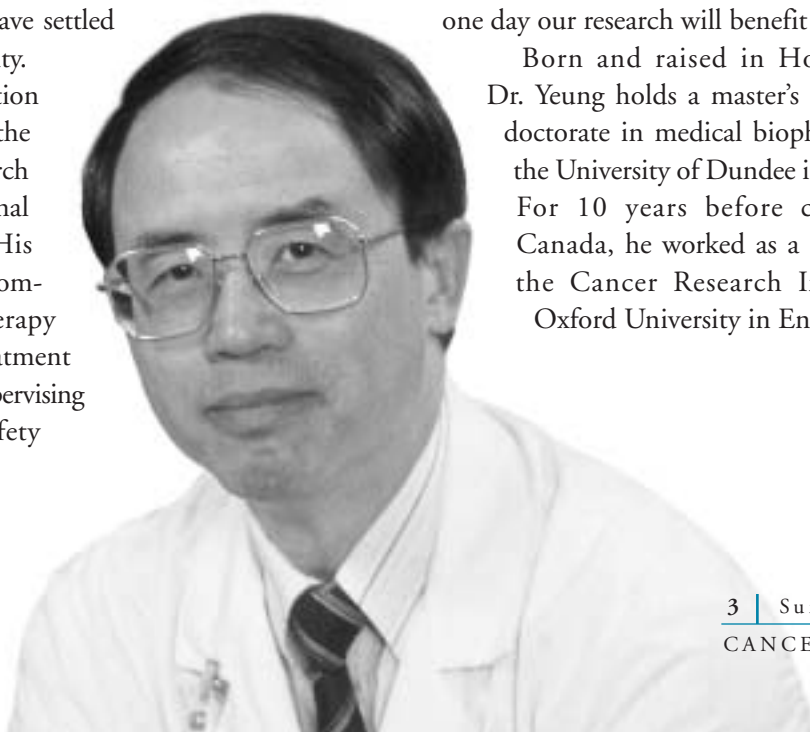
Tai Yeung was looking for a change—both professionally and personally—when in 1991, he accepted a position in medical physics at Northeastern Ontario Regional Cancer Centre and moved with his young family from England to Sudbury. Ten years later, he's convinced they made the right decision. Not only is he happy in his professional life, but he and his family—including his wife, a 16-year-old daughter and a 14-year-old son—have settled happily in their home and community.

As a medical physicist in radiation therapy, Dr. Yeung has found just the right balance of clinical work, research and teaching to make his professional life "interesting and fulfilling." His clinical responsibilities include commissioning of new radiation therapy machines, quality assurance of treatment machines and therapy equipment, supervising treatment planning, radiation safety

and high-dose-rate brachytherapy (placement of a small radioactive source near or within a tumour to treat cancers including lung, prostate and gynecologic cancer).

Dr. Yeung is also involved in research projects aimed at customizing cancer treatment to the characteristics of a patient's tumour. "I have an opportunity to collaborate with oncologists and career scientists. Hopefully one day our research will benefit patients."

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Dr. Yeung holds a master's degree and doctorate in medical biophysics from the University of Dundee in Scotland. For 10 years before coming to Canada, he worked as a scientist at the Cancer Research Institute of Oxford University in England.





ONCOLOGY NURSES

Vicki Sorrenti, RN, CONC

Vicki Harris, RN, CONC

They talk about their work as oncology nurses with the enthusiasm of young women starting out in new and exciting careers. They say each day is about learning, building meaningful relationships with patients and families, and with other members of the multidisciplinary team of cancer care professionals. They describe their work as “challenging, inspiring and completely satisfying.” Together, Vicki Sorrenti, a primary nurse at Toronto-

Sunnybrook Regional Cancer Centre, and Vicki Harris, a chemotherapy nurse at the Centre, have over 45 years of experience as oncology nurses.

“From my very first day as an oncology nurse, I loved everything about it—the patients, the staff, everyone is so caring,” says Vicki Sorrenti. “We experience a great deal of satisfaction in looking after our patients,” echoes Vicki Harris. Both women are certified oncology nurses and have earned the credential called CONC from the Canadian Nurses Association.

Oncology nursing provides the intensity of a critical care unit or emergency environment coupled with a focus on developing long-term relationships with patients and families. By spending time with patients and getting to know them, nurses are in a much better position to understand their needs, and to provide support and assistance.

Would the two Vicki’s recommend oncology nursing to others? “Absolutely,” they agree. Why? “Because we make a difference!”

They describe their work as “challenging, inspiring and completely satisfying.”

RECEPTIONIST-SCHEDULER

Jocelyn Browne, RPN

Jocelyn Browne is a stickler for detail. As a receptionist-scheduler at Kingston Regional Cancer Centre, she coordinates appointments for the treatment planning, radiation treatment and follow-up sections of the Radiation Department. Jocelyn and her co-workers “strive very hard to make sure patients don’t have to wait too long,” she says. “We work really hard on that.”

The department’s three receptionist-schedulers rotate among the sections every month, but must keep up-to-date on all three areas so they’re prepared to work anywhere, anytime. While the job is challenging and can be fast-paced, satisfaction comes from meeting new people and helping patients who have cancer. “I am fascinated and interested



in people and the places they’re from,” Jocelyn says. “I enjoy meeting new people all the time. And it is most rewarding to make sure we give patients the best of care and service.”

A registered practical nurse who has been at the cancer centre for nearly 20 years, Jocelyn has been a receptionist-scheduler since the early 1990s. In addition to booking appointments, she is responsible for gathering relevant medical information from hospitals and referring physicians for each patient’s file. Her organizational skills are also important in her personal life, where the busy mother of three volunteers on two school boards and as a director of Pathfinders (a branch of Girl Guides).

SURGICAL ONCOLOGIST

Jay Engel, MB, BCh, FRCSC, FACS

As a surgical oncologist—a doctor who has specialized in the surgical treatment of cancer—Jay Engel is a fairly new member of the multidisciplinary team at London Regional Cancer Centre. In the past few years, each



regional cancer centre in Ontario has added a surgical oncologist to its team of cancer care professionals. “Being situated in the cancer centre allows for team interaction during clinics and at tumour board meetings,” says Dr. Engel. “With a multidisciplinary approach, we can explore all the treatment options available to the patient

and help them to choose the best care—whether that’s a surgical approach initially, or perhaps using radiation or chemotherapy first.”

In his role as coordinator of the Surgical Oncology Network for the Southwest region of the province, Dr. Engel is a resource for community surgeons who do cancer surgery. “Community surgeons don’t always have the resources that we have in the cancer centres. The network gives us the opportunity to do outreach and to talk directly with them. It is their link with the cancer centre. We act as a liaison for community surgeons, a colleague they can contact to discuss difficult cases.”

Born in London, Ontario, Dr. Engel went to medical school in Dublin, Ireland. He completed his general surgery training at the University of Western Ontario and his fellowship in surgical oncology at the John Wayne Cancer Center in Los Angeles. He is happy to be living back in London, where he and his wife are raising three children.

RADIATION ONCOLOGIST

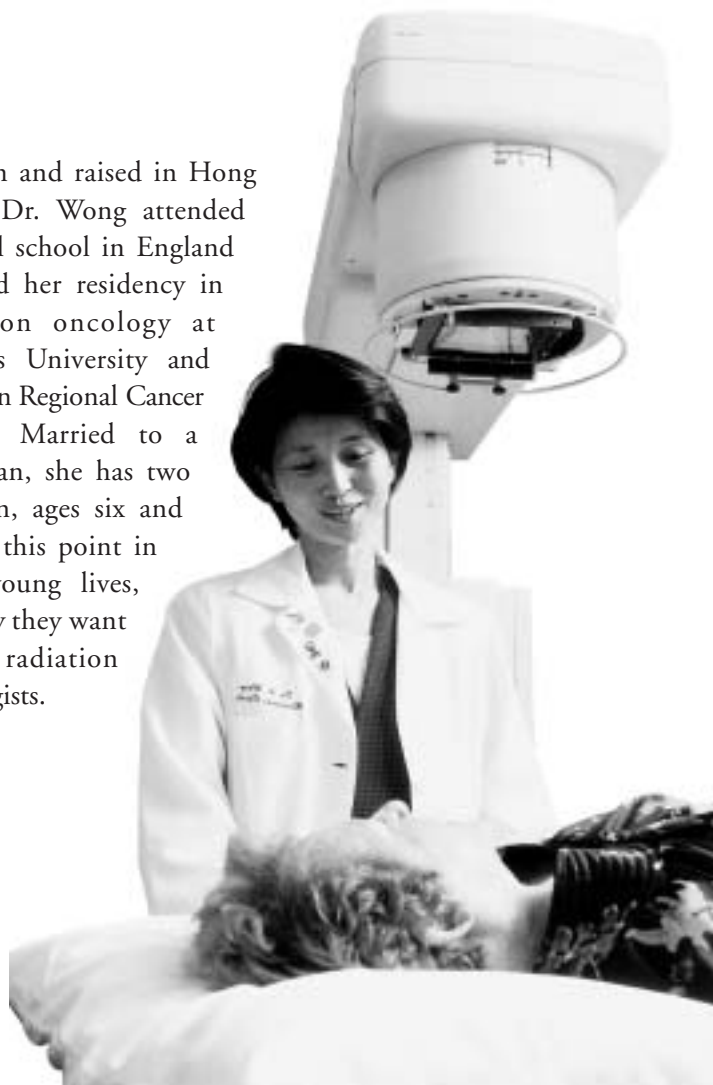
Rebecca Wong, MBChB, FRCPC

“Radiation oncology is a discipline that can help a lot of cancer patients. It’s a very practical specialty,” says Rebecca Wong. “It has technical components that can be very satisfying. And I hope that through research, I can contribute to improvements in patient care.”

As a radiation oncologist at Toronto-Sunnybrook Regional Cancer Centre, Dr. Wong prescribes radiation therapy for the treatment of cancer. The focus of her work is palliative care and the care of patients with gastrointestinal cancers. In her role as coordinator of the Rapid Response Radiation Program, she leads a research team that investigates ways to improve symptom control through the use of radiation therapy for patients living with advanced cancer.

“There are a lot of new technical developments that are being researched and implemented in Ontario. We have state-of-the-art technology that allows radiation therapy to be delivered in ways that could not be done before. We can improve doses, reduce toxicity, and that translates into improved outcomes for patients.”

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Dr. Wong attended medical school in England and did her residency in radiation oncology at Queen’s University and Kingston Regional Cancer Centre. Married to a physician, she has two children, ages six and 10. At this point in their young lives, both say they want to be radiation oncologists.



MEDICAL ONCOLOGIST Dimitrios Vergidis, MD, FRCPC

Dimitrios Vergidis was in training to become a medical oncologist (a physician who provides medical care and treatment for people with cancer) when his father was diagnosed with the disease. “When my father went through his diagnosis and treatment, the oncologist was wonderful. She provided us with a lot of information and helped the family to be more at ease,” says Dr. Vergidis, who is now head of Systemic Therapy at Northwestern Ontario Regional Cancer Centre in Thunder Bay.

Although his father eventually died from his disease, advances in cancer prevention, early detection and treatment now mean that Dr. Vergidis and his colleagues can offer people with cancer more hope than ever before. “Changes in chemotherapy, various other treatments and supportive care have improved the quality of life and survival for most patients with cancer,” he says.

Dr. Vergidis believes that the recent sequencing of the human genome, and the development of new classes of drugs used in combination with more traditional drugs, will further the understanding of cancer and lead to treatment that is customized to the individual patient.



“The young people who aspire to work in this field will be able to apply these new technologies and scientific ideas. There is tremendous hope in the field of oncology, and I’m very optimistic that the future will be even brighter.”



PHARMACIST Sean Hopkins, BSc, BSP

“Challenging, evolving and satisfying” is how Sean Hopkins describes his role as an oncology pharmacist at Ottawa Regional Cancer Centre. “There have been huge changes in treating advanced disease with new medications,” says Sean. “People are being cured at a higher rate, and many people are being maintained with stable disease for a much longer time than in the past. That’s very uplifting to see.”

As an oncology pharmacist, Sean checks drug orders, verifies doses, and looks for possible drug interactions between chemotherapy medications and other drugs a patient might be taking. After each

“The pharmacist is becoming an integral part of the team that looks to find the best way to treat each individual patient.”

chemotherapy order is prepared, the pharmacist checks to ensure it is the correct drug or combination of drugs, and the correct dose.

However, the role of the oncology pharmacist is gradually moving away from drug distribution. Pharmacists are spending more time counselling patients about chemotherapy, side effects and clinical trials—a role Sean says is his “favourite part of the job.” He is also a member of the multidisciplinary team that plans and delivers treatment for cancer patients. “The

pharmacist is becoming an integral part of the team that looks to find the best way to treat each individual patient,” Sean says.

Before taking his pharmacy degree, Sean worked as a clerk at the cancer centre. “I spoke with a lot of physicians and nurses during that time. I gained an appreciation for what was going on and it sparked my interest.”

PHARMACY TECHNICIAN

Mary Jo Calvert

Family is important to Mary Jo Calvert, the mother of two grown daughters. That’s one of the reasons she loves her job as a pharmacy technician at London Regional Cancer Centre. “I enjoy the people,” she says. “It’s like a close-knit family.”

In addition to drawing up chemotherapy orders, pharmacy technicians are responsible for entering the data into the computer so it will appear on the patient’s record. They also prepare out-patient prescriptions, prepare billings for the pharmacy, and are involved in many aspects of clinical trials.

“I feel like I’m doing something worthwhile. And I like it here.”

One of the most fulfilling parts of the job for Mary Jo is interacting with her co-workers, and patients and their families. “At the cancer centre,” she says, “it’s often family members who come to fill the prescriptions. I think it makes them more comfortable to see the same faces behind the counter all the time. It’s a friendly atmosphere.”

After 22 years as a pharmacy technician, Mary Jo still finds the work challenging and fulfilling. “I feel like I’m doing something worthwhile,” she says with satisfaction. “And I like it here.”

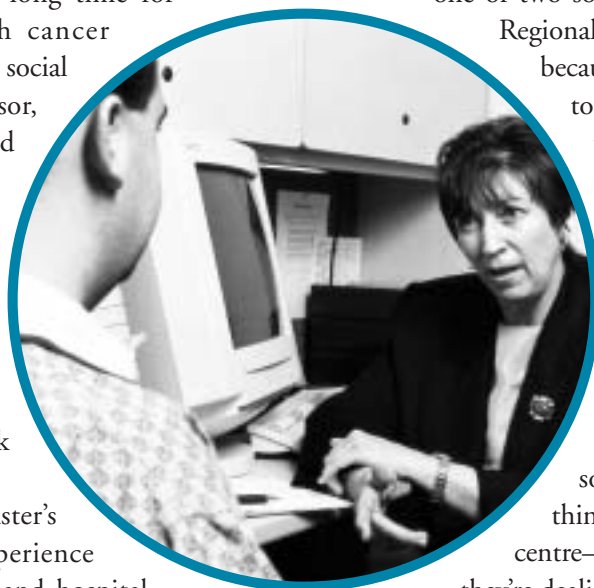


SOCIAL WORKER

Sharron Mailloux, MSW

Sharron Mailloux has waited a long time for an opportunity to work with cancer patients. While she was studying social work at the University of Windsor, her son's 18-year-old friend died of leukemia. "He was very close to us, and the families were close," she says. "It was difficult for all of us." The experience helped her become familiar with the needs of cancer patients and their families. "I thought, 'This is somewhere I'd like to work. I think I can make a difference here.'"

After graduating with a master's degree in 1994, she gained experience working in a variety of hospice and hospital settings. This spring, Sharron was thrilled to be offered



one of two social work positions at Windsor Regional Cancer Centre. "I'm delighted because it's a new service. We're going to be able to create programs to fill the needs of cancer patients and their families, and that's really exciting." She started at the Centre on April 30.

"I enjoy doing what I do because sometimes you make a difference in people's lives, and that's very fulfilling. Even small differences can change someone's quality of life, and I think that's the focus at the cancer centre—helping patients live well while they're dealing with cancer."

GENERAL PRACTITIONER, ONCOLOGY

Pamela Craigie, MD

A general practitioner in medical oncology at Hamilton Regional Cancer Centre, Pamela Craigie says she "fell into oncology by accident." After completing a rotating internship in Ottawa, she accepted a position as a clinical associate at Ottawa Regional Cancer Centre,

where she stayed for four years. She was surprised to find that people living with cancer can have a good quality of life and sometimes live for years. "I really had no idea what I was getting into but I've found something that is very interesting and rewarding."

General practitioners in oncology are physicians who work closely with

oncologists and other health care professionals to provide emergency, in-patient and out-patient assessment and care. The continuity of patient care is one of the aspects of her job that Dr. Craigie finds most fulfilling. With nine years experience in cancer care, "I appreciate more than ever the teamwork and commitment required to provide excellent care. We have a great group of people working together in our cancer centres and I am proud to be part of that team."

Working regular hours at the cancer centre allows the mother of two young children to spend time with her family. She is happy to have found a career that provides a healthy balance between her work life and her home life. ▼





Building *a cancer care* WORKFORCE

On his right wrist, Dr. Bill Evans wears a chain-link bracelet given to him years ago by a grateful patient—a long-term survivor of a rare form of cancer. “I just about never take this bracelet off,” says Dr. Evans, a medical oncologist for 25 years and executive vice-president of Cancer Care Ontario. “I wear it to remind myself that no matter what work I’m doing, it always should be focused on helping patients.”

Providing high-quality, comprehensive and coordinated care and service to meet the needs of cancer patients and their families is what Cancer Care Ontario is all about. And it’s a central theme of the agency’s human resource strategy. The strategy is designed to retain, recruit and train more oncology professionals—including oncologists, radiation therapists, nurses, medical physicists and pharmacists—at a time when they are in short supply across Canada and internationally. (In recent years, a nationwide lack of radiation professionals has resulted in extended waiting lists, and six of 10 Canadian provinces have referred patients to the United States for radiation therapy. In May, Cancer Care

Ontario stopped referring patients to the U.S. because of the sustained hard work of Radiation Therapy Program staff across the province, and because of the success of an after-hours clinic located at Toronto-Sunnybrook Regional Cancer Centre.)

“Oncology careers offer tremendous opportunities,” says Dr. Evans. “The pace of change is accelerating. Compared to when I entered the field, there is now so much more we can do to help people—to cure, often to extend survival, and to manage symptoms better. A career in oncology is always changing, interesting and stimulating. It will afford opportunities for ongoing learning and research, and the chance to contribute to new knowledge.”

Cancer Care Ontario employs 2,500 staff across the province. An additional 1,000 employees will be required within five years, according to Don Taylor, the agency’s vice-president of Human Resources. “The need reflects the combined effect of several factors: the increasing incidence of cancer, the growing complexity of treatment and advances in technology,” he explains.

This year, 50,000 Ontarians will be diagnosed with cancer. While the incidence of cancer rises about 3% each year, demand for cancer care is escalating at a much higher rate—7% to 10% annually. This increase in demand is due to the availability of new and complex treatments, and the development of new uses for existing treatments. “We can now treat patients who have cancers that we couldn’t treat before,” says Dr. Evans. “We’re also using treatments in new ways. Treatments that were previously used to palliate people with advanced-stage disease are now being used in earlier-stage disease as adjuvant therapies with the goal of cure.”

Increases in demand for cancer care, plus plans to open up to five new regional cancer centres in Ontario by

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care agreement to provide funding to move toward those workload levels,” says Dr. Evans. “That’s a very powerful signal to send out to people who are training and making a decision about an oncology career versus another medical career.”

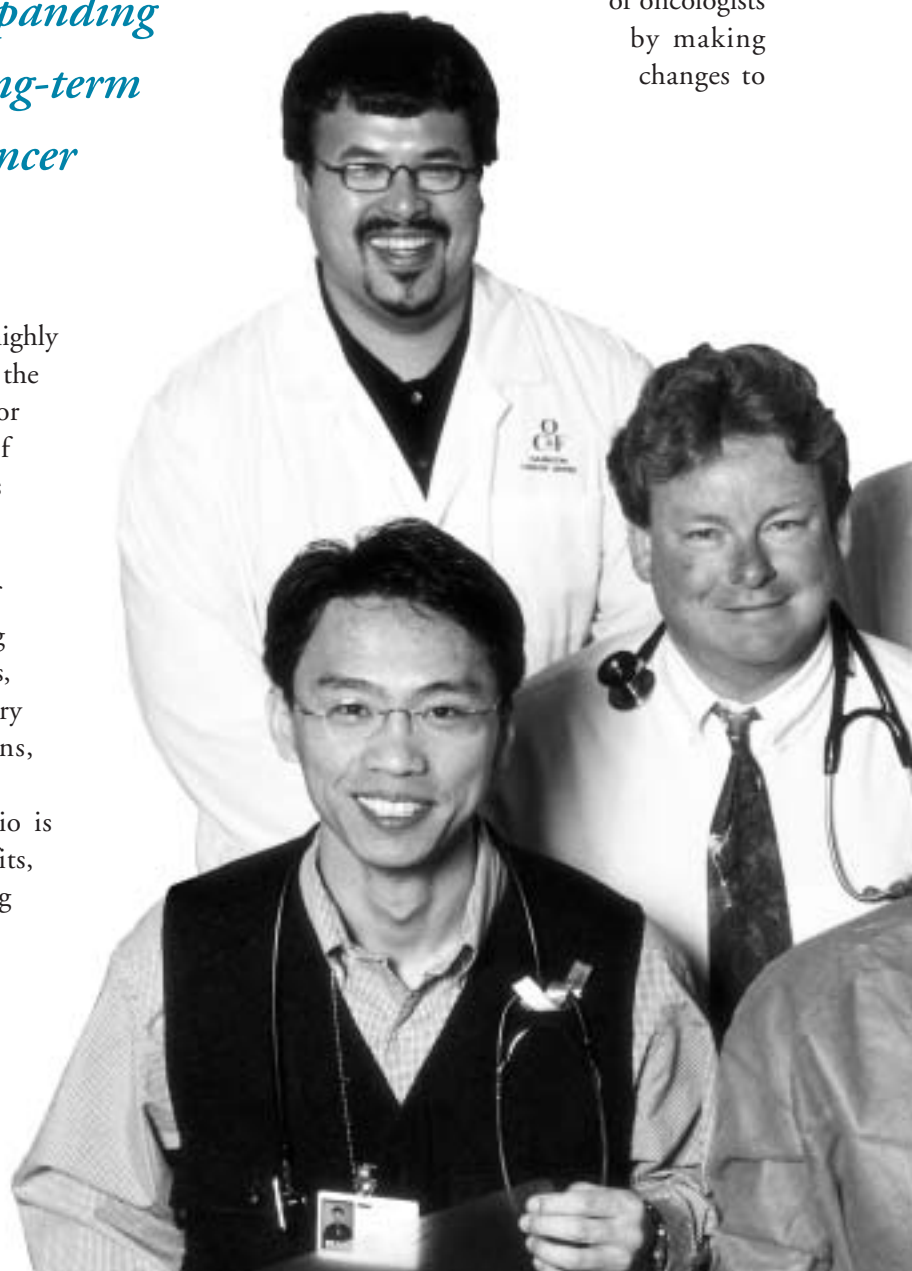
Since early in 1999, Cancer Care Ontario has been conducting a national and international recruitment program for radiation professionals. The program has resulted in a net gain of 106 radiation therapists, 27 radiation oncologists and 10 medical physicists. Recruitment efforts are expanding to include professionals in systemic therapy (chemotherapy and hormone therapy). The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and the College of Physicians and

Surgeons of Ontario
are assisting with
the recruitment
of oncologists
by making
changes to

Encouraging young people to consider careers in cancer care, and expanding training programs, are the long-term solutions to the shortage of cancer care providers.

2005, make it essential that sufficient numbers of highly qualified cancer care providers be on hand to meet the needs of patients. To keep pace with the demand for care and service, and to address the shortage of oncology professionals, Cancer Care Ontario has developed a strategy that focuses on retention of existing staff, centrally coordinated national and international recruitment, and the expansion of training programs. The strategy involves working closely with the provincial and federal governments, other cancer care agencies and providers, regulatory and licensing bodies, professional associations, universities, and colleges.

To retain existing staff, Cancer Care Ontario is focusing on competitive compensation, benefits, enhanced educational opportunities, and nurturing a work environment that supports teaching and research activities. “We’ve also established what we believe are reasonable workload planning standards, and have achieved with the



the requirements for licensure and certification. "Our role is to educate and advocate for methods of evaluating and appraising graduates from other countries to make sure that those who are qualified are able to get into the Canadian system," says Dr. Peeter Poldre, Cancer Care Ontario's head of Education.

Encouraging young people to consider careers in cancer care, and expanding training programs, are the long-term solutions to the shortage of cancer care providers. "Looking ahead, the main thing we can do is to ensure that we are training sufficient numbers of people," says Dr. Randy Bissett, Cancer Care Ontario's interim coordinator of the Radiation Treatment Program. While there is still much to be accomplished in this area, there has been progress:

- The Ontario training program for radiation therapists has expanded over the past few years. In February 2001, 40 radiation therapists graduated from the Michener Institute, and all but three accepted employment in Ontario.

- Cancer Care Ontario has expanded the number of training positions for medical physicists in its regional cancer centres.
- Oncology was identified as a priority health program in the report of the Expert Panel on Health Professional Human Resources, which was released recently by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. "This will assist in future decision-making to increase the number of postgraduate positions for the training of oncologists," explains Dr. Evans.

At the medical school level, Cancer Care Ontario is encouraging its oncologists to become involved in undergraduate training at university faculties of medicine. "This is an opportunity for medical students to make connections with cancer care professionals," explains Dr. Poldre, "and it's a chance for students to explore the possibility of oncology careers."

Second-year medical students also can apply to spend a summer at an Ontario regional cancer centre or in a pediatric oncology setting through the Ivan Smith Summer Studentship, a program co-sponsored by Cancer Care Ontario and the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario Division. "These studentships place medical students in a cancer care setting where they work with cancer professionals and get a feel for whether they might have an interest in oncology," says Dr. Poldre.

About 20% of Ivan Smith students from the late 1980s and early 1990s have chosen oncology-related careers.

Cancer Care Ontario also is contributing to oncology human resource planning at the provincial and national levels. The agency is an active member of Ontario's Cancer Human Resources Committee and a key player in the national human resource planning efforts of the Canadian Association of Provincial Cancer Agencies, an organization chaired by Cancer Care Ontario Chairman Peter Crossgrove. The association has identified human resources as its number-one priority and as the single most important issue facing cancer care in the country. ♡



On the Cover

FERNAND RACICOT AND NURSE, PAT HENDERSON



Pat Henderson is always here to help me—and she reminds me of that all the time. She has been my primary nurse through much of the 17 years that I've had malignant melanoma, a form of skin cancer that often is deadly once it spreads. With the help and support of Pat; my oncologist, Dr. Dimitrios Vergidis; and a wonderful team at Northwestern Ontario Regional Cancer Centre in Thunder Bay, I've found the confidence and courage to fight back.

A mole on my lower back was found to be malignant in 1984, when I was 36. Over the years, the cancer spread to my left shoulder, my lower right leg and the lymph nodes in my groin. I've had six surgeries, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and over 500 injections of Interferon to build up my immune system. I am monitored closely and continue to do well. My work involves travel, but I make time to be a patient representative on the cancer centre's Quality Council and on Cancer Care Ontario Northwest Region's Systemic Therapy Network, and I recently participated in the Centre's new video on fatigue. It's my way of giving something back because the quality of care I've received is second-to-none.

I'd like to thank my friends at the cancer centre for their kindness following the recent death of my wife and main supporter, Sherrell. As Pat reminds me all the time, she and her colleagues are always there for me. It makes all the difference in the world. ♡

TO CONTACT CANCER CARE ONTARIO IN YOUR REGION, CALL:

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Toronto-Sunnybrook Regional
Cancer Centre: 416-480-4566

Central West Region

Hamilton Regional Cancer Centre:
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Southwest Region

London Regional Cancer Centre:
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Grand River Regional Cancer Centre:
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