

## **Oncology Unit Celebrating 25 years**

### **Then, through the years and Now**

#### **Where we began.....**

The Oncology Unit opened at the Dryden Regional Health Center, in April of 1998, with the concept of “care close to home” in mind. It operated as a satellite program of the Northwest Ontario Regional Cancer Center in Thunder Bay.

Initially, we operated with two treatment chairs in an old four patient ward room located at the far end of the West Unit hallway with a three quarter wall separating the treatment chairs from the pre chemo assessment stretchers.

The unit was only open on an “as needed” basis staffed with two part time Registered Nurses alternating four hour shifts to administer chemotherapy as needed.

The Oncology Unit was also supported by two family physicians who saw patients and performed pre-chemotherapy assessments prior to treatment.



By the end of 1998, the Oncology Unit was busy enough to increase our hours of operation to four hours daily, five days a week to accommodate all of our chemotherapy patients.

Oncology services were offered out of this four bed ward room until January of 2002 when renovations began on the west unit, including a new Oncology Unit. While renovations were underway, Oncology was temporarily moved to a four-bed pediatric room on the west unit, where it remained for six months.



***Cancer society gives to hospital***

The Canadian Cancer Society donated \$3,500 to the Dryden Regional Health Centre. The funds are to establish a waiting room in the West Wing to accommodate patients and families using the diabetes centre, oncology unit and other services. Back row: (l-r) Lorraine Moore, society volunteer; Andrea Minor, oncology unit; Nancy Davis, society volunteer coordinator; Michelle Teeple, volunteer. Front row: Dody Ridgeway, volunteer; Kiri Butter, community programs consultant for northwest region, Canadian Cancer Society; Mabel Beck, volunteer and Gail Braun, society clinic convener.

*Staff photo*

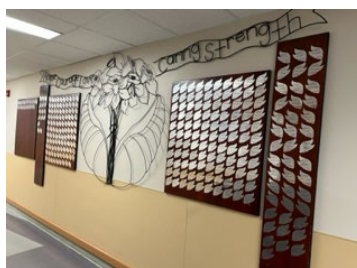
By the end of June 2002 Oncology Unit moved to its current location on the West Unit. In this first iteration of its permanent home, the Oncology Unit was set up as a single large room with two chemotherapy chairs, a small assessment room and a small private room with a stretcher and an even smaller room with a special hood where the chemotherapy was mixed.

The nursing desk sat near the middle of the room and was staffed by two part-time nurses alternating four hour shifts five days a week.



### **Bouquet of Hope**

In March of 2004 the “Bouquet of Hope” wall came to life where a waiting room was created for patients waiting for their treatments. It is a uniquely beautiful locally handcrafted wall hanging. It was a great way to showcase a recognition program. The “Bouquet of Hope” is a touching way donors can honor their loved ones touched by cancer. The waiting room is no longer in place but the Bouquet of hope wall has moved down the hall outside of the Oncology unit patient door.



In April 2004 three RN's from the Oncology Unit were recognized for their caring and compassionate work with patients and received the

‘Service to Health Care’ award from the Dryden District Chamber of Commerce. Honoring those who have demonstrate excellence in the Health Services sector.



*Elva Watts, chair of the Dryden Regional Health Centre board of directors presents the Service To Health Care Award to Andrea Minor, Cathy West and Jennifer Nesbitt of the DRHC's Oncology Unit.*

### **Dragon Boat Races and the “Still Me” Program**

In the winter of 2005, The Dryden Oncology Unit staff were approached by the local Kinsmen Club with a generous offer to donate the proceeds at the annual Dragon Boat Races to provide ongoing support to local cancer patients.

A decision was made to develop a new program that would help patients undergoing cancer treatments, to feel good about themselves.

With cancer care available closer to home, it was felt the supportive program should also be locally accessible. “The Still Me Program” was created on the concept that if a person living with cancer can be helped to look good, their improved self-image will help them approach cancer and their treatment with greater confidence.

The Still Me program is dedicated to helping patients with cancer overcome appearance related side effects of treatment, and is much more than just make up. It provides patients with a support system that delivers warmth, laughter, and fun in a non-threatening, non-medical environment. “Still Me” sessions for women are held at the Dryden Regional Health Center with the assistance of dedicated volunteers. Men are also provided with a self-care kit to assist them in managing the side effects of cancer treatment. While the COVID-19 pandemic put a halt on in-person sessions, they are expected to resume shortly.

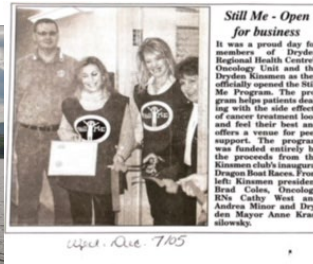
The “Still Me’ program closely resembles the well-known Look Good Feel Better program. Over the years, our staff had the opportunity to hear numerous stories from the patient’s that were fortunate enough to be able to attend similar programs in larger cancer centers. Due to the small size of our community several applications to open a local chapter of Look Good Feel better program had been unsuccessful.

The “Still Me’ program is a locally developed, volunteer driven solution to support patients in the community during treatment.

Along with the “Still Me” sessions, a wig and hat lending program was created. Wigs and hats in various styles are available for lending at no cost through the Dryden Oncology Unit.

The “Still Me” program would not be possible without the Kinsmen Club proceeds from the Dragon Boat Races and dedicated volunteers. The volunteers come with varied experience, from retired hairdressers, makeup consultants, retired hospital employees, and many others that have been touched by cancer.





## Oncology Unit Renovations and Service Expansion

Several years later, the Oncology unit had undergone the first of its renovations. The small private room was removed as it was not large enough, and our patients had a difficult time getting around with an IV pole, and/or a wheelchair in such close quarters.

This opened up the room with a curtain installed to maintain privacy if a patient needed to use a stretcher for their treatment. This change increased space, allowing for an additional treatment chair for a total of three chairs. During this time, we increased our hours of operation to eight hours per day, five days a week.



In 2007, a local physician was awarded the Human Touch award by Cancer Care Ontario which recognizes and honors health care professionals, and providers who demonstrate exceptional and compassionate patient care. Going beyond their job descriptions to extend the kind of care to patients we would all want our loved ones to receive.

In receiving this award this Physician insisted it belonged to all of those who contributed to the care of the patient's. Including the Thunder Bay Regional Cancer Care staff and especially those who work alongside her at the Dryden Regional Health Center Chemotherapy unit.



Dr. Karen Mazurki, centre, shares the recently presented Human Touch award with oncology unit volunteers (from left) Adrienne Dawes and Mary Gillespie and registered nurses Andrea Minor and Cathy West. They represent a small part of the staff and volunteers who care for area cancer patients. Dr. Mazurki insisted that the award belongs to all those who contribute to the care of all patients.

As 2007 came to an end, the Oncology unit once again outgrew the space as our patient loads increased. Thanks to a grant from the Northern Cancer Research Foundation, the DRHC Oncology Unit was able to improve their resources for regional patients receiving cancer treatment through equipment upgrades and expansion.

It is difficult to provide the best cancer treatments, especially chemotherapy and ensure confidentiality when space is limited. This funding came at a time of increased demand for chemotherapy treatment and the need for new equipment.

The wall between the Oncology department and Cancer Society volunteer office was opened up to make it one large open area where the volunteers would be easily accessible and create more treatment chair room. With the wall removal, we were able to have an additional chair for a total of four treatment chairs, a stretcher, and a small assessment room to ensure efficient and confidential treatment to patients.



*Members of Dryden Regional Health Centre's oncology department happily received a \$16,555 grant from the Northern Cancer Research Fund to upgrade equipment and expand their program.  
Photo submitted*





In April of 2008, the Oncology Unit team received the Human Touch award as another shining example of the success of the Regional Satellite Cancer Program, and more importantly a reflection of the contribution that is made every day to the patients of Northwestern Ontario.

According to patients and their families, the chemotherapy unit at the Dryden Regional Health Center is comprised of “a group of angels” with the bond that develops between the team and patients described as “an extended family.”

“The most amazing features of this team are the laughter and smiles, along with the tears, that are witnessed when one walks through the doors of the unit.” Remarked one patient as part of the Teams nomination for the Human Touch award. “It is no wonder that patients and their families have difficulty cutting the apron strings when their treatments are finished or a loved one has passed away.”



By 2012 the Oncology unit had continued to grow, with expanded services to treat patients with stage 3 and 4 cancers which had not been provided in the past. These cases required more complex and longer treatments (sometimes several years, with patient received up to five or six drugs at a time).

Cycles of chemotherapy became more frequent (from 3-4 weeks to an average of every two weeks), and more treatment options became available. Emerging chemotherapy drugs taken orally were made available, though side effects are just as profound as with IV chemotherapy.

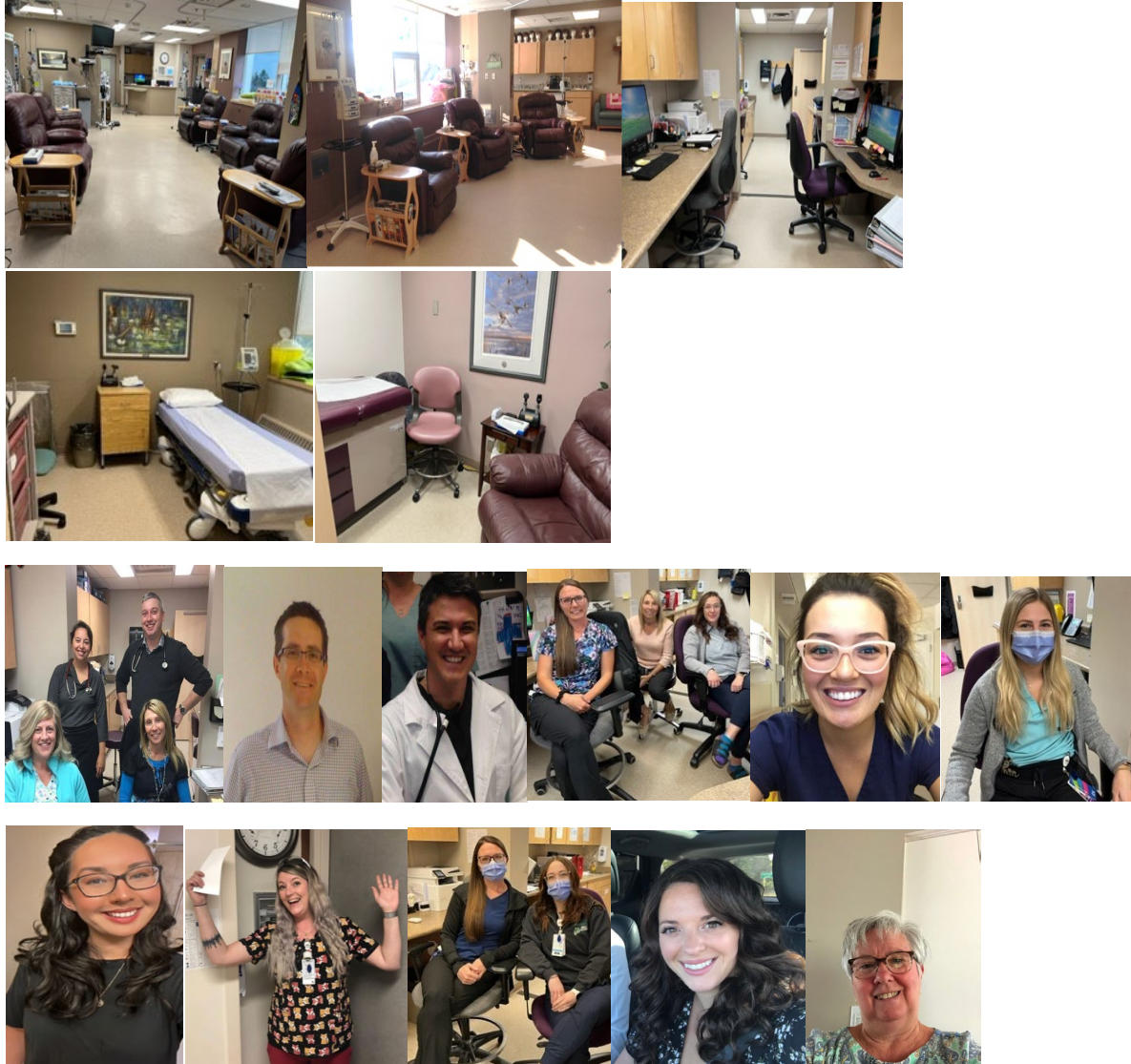
To ensure patient adherence, safety, and education, the Oncology team must be involved in the process when oral chemotherapy is initiated and throughout the course of treatment. We started to offer oral chemotherapy assessments, with nurses and the physician responsible for assessing patients, education and following up with side effects.

Immunotherapy became a popular treatment and better tolerated by patients, but still required chair time and assessments. In addition to chemotherapy administration, we offered many supportive treatments such as blood transfusions, hormone injections, magnesium infusions, IV hydration, telephone support, PICC & Porta cath care and many more. All of these services required even more space.

Through a Thunder Bay Regional Health Science Foundation grant, DRHC was able to secure some funding for this expansion of the Oncology unit. We were able to open up our side walls using part of the surgical offices creating a spacious assessment room, a physician charting area and supply room. We moved the chemotherapy mixing hood out of the unit into Pharmacy allowing for a larger nursing desk and creating space for a fifth treatment chair, a small waiting room and two assessment rooms.

This is our existing Oncology unit to this day. Operating Monday through Friday from 7:30 am- 3:30 pm, our Oncology Department is staffed with one full-time and one part-time RN, and supported by two family physicians who work closely with nurses and patients prior to their chemotherapy and to monitor for side effects.

At present we have approximately 75 active Oncology patients and last year from January 1, 2022- December 31, 2022, we had 1107 outpatient visits.



### **Acknowledgements**

We would not have been able to run this successful Oncology unit for the last 25 years if we didn't have the dedicated compassionate Oncology nurses and Physicians, as well as the support of DRHC's Supportive care counselling, laboratory, diagnostic imaging, surgical, emergency, the

inpatient unit, physiotherapy, Family Health team, support service staff, volunteers, and Senior management. DRHC's Oncology Unit is also supported by the Thunder Bay regional Cancer Center. Many changes have occurred throughout the past 25 years and without this wonderful team at the Dryden Regional Health Center we would not have been able to accomplish such great strides.

We would be remiss to not mention all the fundraisers that different community organizations have had over the last 25 years in order to raise money for our Oncology unit.

We have so much pride and are grateful for all that the community has done to contribute to the successful running of our unit. Whether its monetary or homemade articles such as quilts blankets, pictures, wigs, prosthesis we could not run such successful programing without the support of our community members. We appreciate and are grateful for their contributions.

**There have been countless fundraising efforts for the Oncology Unit over the years, including:**

- Trillium Lions club
- The Royal Canadian Legion's Meat Draws
- Bouquet of Hope
- Canadian Cancer Society
- CIBC Run for the Cure, CIBC
- Terry Fox walks
- Ella Lynn's
- Gould's
- Dufrense furniture and Appliances
- Kinsmen Club
- Curves for Women



- Northern Cancer Research Foundation
- Thunder Bay Regional Health Science Center Foundation
- Mavens
- Relay for Life
- RBC Royal Bank
- Dryden GM Ice Dogs “Pink the Rink”
- Mike Rushak Memorial Pool tournaments
- Street Meats
- Theater 17’s production of Calendar Girls
- Dryden Regional Health Services Foundation
- Countless donations from patients and families
- Various benefits, socials and hair shaving events
- Annual Mud Run
- Dream Believers “Shake your Booty”
- Girls Night out Comfort care packages
- Many more that I may have forgotten

All such great fundraisers, and are greatly appreciated by the patients and the staff. No matter how small or large the contributions were, the success of the Oncology unit would not have happened without this support. Thank you and here’s to celebrating 25 years of caring for Oncology patients and being able to give safe, quality, compassionate care to each and every one of our patients.

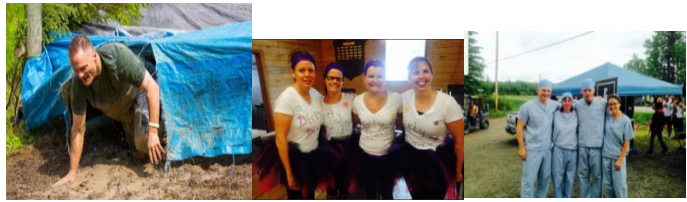
**Cathy West HBScN, RN, CONC**

Manager, Oncology and Employee Health

Dryden Regional Health Center

**25 year Oncology Nurse**

# Dryden Regional Health Centre Celebrating 25 Years of the Oncology Unit



**Student supports CT scanner project**  
In a personal fundraising drive, DHS student Nicole Winstanley raised \$7,000 in support of the Oncology Unit at the Dryden Regional Health Centre. The moneys were donated to the Oncology Unit in support of a CT Scan.

**Sharing heads to support Oncology patients**  
(l-r) Fatima Davidson, a Canadian Cancer Society volunteer thanks, Alice Skerzner of Allie's Fashion, Audree Brown, an oncology nurse and Board Director of Faith Hope & Love in their donation of hair to the Dryden Regional Health Centre's Oncology unit, while fellow Cancer Society volunteer Mary Vermeas thanks an 11-year-old local boy for his hair as a way of relieving the stress and providing support for friends now receiving chemotherapy at the oncology unit. Missing from the photo is James Doherty of Richmond House.



**Legion gives to oncology**  
Dryden Oncology nurse Cathy West accepts a cheque from Legion President Eric Parker, with fellow nurse Andrea Minor joining in on the presentation. The Legion raised \$3,681.04 through its weekly Friday night Meat Draw. The draws help raise money for the community, in addition to Legion Operations, meaning the more people who come out, the more money the Legion will have for its many special projects.

PAGE TWENTY-TWO  
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2004



**A quilt for the Oncology Unit**  
(l-r) Stacey Friesen hands over a hand-made quilt to Dick Armit and Oncology nurse Cathy West. Friesen donated the quilt to the Dryden Regional Health Centre's Oncology Unit.



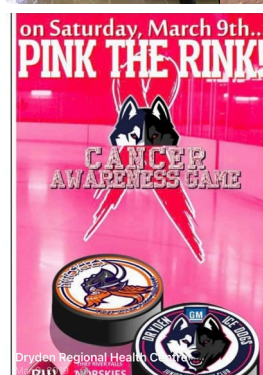
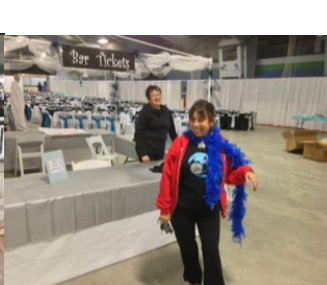
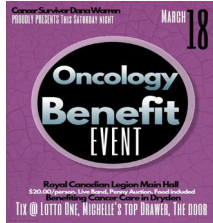
**In memory of a fighter**  
The Dryden Regional Health Centre recently received a generous donation of \$1,000 to be dedicated to the oncology unit in memory of Bernice Widdien, Widdien and Carolyn Callan wrote a children's book entitled Because I'm a Fighter, and have donated the proceeds to the Oncology Unit. Copies of this book can be purchased in the Dryden Regional Health Centre Gift Shop, Northwest Nutrition, St. Joseph's School, and Pharmasave. Shown: (l-r) Debrae Farthing, associate executive director of Patient Care Services, Carolyn Callan, co-author and friend of Bernice Widdien, Cathy West, oncology nurse, and Terry Widdien.



**Trillium Lions make donation**  
Sharon Sweeney of the Trillium Lions Club presents a \$950 cheque to Cathy West for the Dryden Regional Health Centre's Oncology Unit.



# Dryden Regional Health Centre Celebrating 25 Years of the Oncology Unit





### Local Run for the Cure raises \$12,000

Over 100 people took part in the 4th annual CIBC Run for the Cure, which took place Oct. 3. Evan Arnold was among those who went to Riverview Lodge for the kickoff of the event. For more coverage of the run, see page 9.

### Terry Fox Run

The Terry Fox Run is a fundraising event in support of cancer research. It is held annually in Dryden, Ontario.



The biggest crowd ever, 100 people, came out in support of the 10th annual Terry Fox Run, held Sept. 25.



Individuals, students, school and other took their step to raising \$2,000 for the Terry Fox Run.



WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2004



### Walking for Terry

Students from Pinewood School prepare to start their Terry Fox walk to Stanley Beach Park. The students walked to raise money for the Terry Fox Run which supports cancer research. Organizers are still calculating how much money the school raised from the annual event. See page 11 for photos of Dryden's Terry Fox Run.

Warner Bloomfield photo



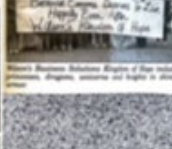
### Running for a cure

More than 100 participants of all ages took part in the 4th annual CIBC Run for the Cure, which took place Oct. 3. Evan Arnold was among those who went to Riverview Lodge for the kickoff of the event. For more coverage of the run, see page 9.



### For strength and life, they relayed

The Dryden, Ontario Agriplex Foundation has been successful in raising money for the Terry Fox Run for Life in support of cancer research. The foundation has been successful in raising money for the Terry Fox Run for Life in support of cancer research. The foundation has been successful in raising money for the Terry Fox Run for Life in support of cancer research.



A group of girls were prepared for the day of walking, sporting their white and red gear and positive attitudes during the special summer event.