

Strengthening primary cancer prevention programs in Northern BC *Researchers take a collaborative approach to disease-prevention strategies*

With nearly \$1 million in funding from the Canadian Cancer Society, researchers at the University of British Columbia and Athabasca University are collaborating with health-care agencies to target cancer prevention strategies in northern BC, where cancer incidence rates are the highest in the province.

Partners include the Canadian Cancer Society – BC and Yukon Division, the BC Cancer Agency, and Northern Health.

Prof. Joan Bottorff, director of the Institute for Healthy Living and Chronic Disease Prevention at UBC's Okanagan campus, is spearheading the multi-sector team of researchers and health professionals in two projects aimed at reducing the incidence of cancer in northern British Columbia.

"There is a pressing need for improved primary cancer prevention in northern BC, where mortality rates due to cancer are high in comparison to other health regions in British Columbiaⁱ," says Bottorff.

The smoking rate in northern BC is 24 per cent, substantially higher than the provincial average of 14 per centⁱⁱ, and the region has the highest rate of lung cancer in the provinceⁱⁱⁱ. As well, reports consistently show higher obesity levels in the Northern Health region. In 2009-10, 45 per cent of the BC population was considered obese or overweight, while the Northern Health region averaged 57 per cent^{iv}. In particular, obesity rates among northern men are higher than the rest of the province^v.

"Based on the evidence, it was determined that smoking cessation, as well as healthy eating and active living among men, were key cancer prevention initiatives," says Bottorff. "Avoiding tobacco, staying physically active throughout life, consuming a healthy diet, and maintaining a healthy weight have been shown to reduce one's lifetime risk of developing and dying from cancer."

Due to the large size of the northern region and its dispersed populations, delivering cancer prevention services is challenging, making it difficult for any one organization to have a significant and lasting impact.

To address the issue, Bottorff and her team are developing and evaluating approaches for delivering two cooperative cancer prevention projects specifically tailored for northern BC communities.

"This is a really exciting opportunity to further support the great work of the three agencies," says Lucy Beck, regional director, public health protection, Northern Health Authority. "We need to continually work together to ensure we are providing strong and unified services to northerners, and our collective impact on this work moves us in the right direction."

The first project is titled Stop Smoking Before Surgery, and is being implemented in the two pilot communities of Prince George and Prince Rupert.

"Many people do not know that stopping smoking eight weeks before surgery leads to improved recovery and often a shorter hospital stay^{vi}. This initiative is an excellent opportunity to showcase an innovative partnership approach to primary cancer prevention that grew out of the northern cancer control strategy," says Sonia Lamont, provincial director, prevention programs, BC Cancer Agency.

“The importance of primary cancer prevention cannot be overstated. By implementing what we know today about the main preventable risk factors for cancer, more than 40 per cent of cancers can be prevented^{vii}. This is very important for British Columbians to know so that action can be taken towards healthier lifestyle choices.”

Project two, titled Men’s Healthy Eating and Active Living, is taking place in Prince George and Dawson Creek. It focuses on the research and development of new and innovative programs and services promoting healthy eating and active living among men.

“In Canada, the number of new cancer cases diagnosed continues to rise, placing greater demands on healthcare systems^{viii},” says Margaret Jones-Bricker, regional director, Canadian Cancer Society, BC and Yukon Division. “The best way to control cancer is to prevent it. By working together, we can combine resources to create a strong regional prevention initiative in northern BC.

“Harmonizing cancer prevention services will have an impact on the region’s burden of cancer, and will also inform how other Canadian regions can deliver similar programs.”

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Prof. Joan Bottorff is leading two major projects in cancer prevention in Northern BC.

A high-resolution version of this photo can be downloaded from:

http://universityrelations.ok.ubc.ca/News2013/Joan_Bottorff/Joan_Bottorff.jpg

ⁱ British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency. (2011). Summary Statistics by Health Authority, British Columbia, 2007–2011. In *Selected Vital Statistics and Health Status Indicators: One Hundred and Fortieth Annual Report*.

ⁱⁱ Northern Health. (2012). *Position on Tobacco reduction. An integrated population health report*.

ⁱⁱⁱ BC Cancer Agency. (2012) *British Columbia 2011 Regional Cancer Report*. Population Oncology.

^{iv} BC Cancer Agency. (2012). British Columbia Regional Cancer Control Statistics Report; Available at: <http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/HPI/CancerStatistics/default.htm>

^v Kerr J. (2011). Where are the Men? Chief Medical Health Officer's Report on the Health and Wellbeing of Men and Boys in Northern BC.

^{vi} Wong, J. et al. (2012) .Short-term preoperative smoking cessation and postoperative complications: A systemic review and meta-analysis. *Canadian Journal of Anesthesia*, 59, 268-279.

^{vii} Parkin, D.M. (2011). The fraction of cancer attributable to lifestyle and environmental factors in the UK in 2010. *British Journal of Cancer*, 105, S77-S81.

^{viii} Canadian Cancer Society's Steering Committee on Cancer Statistics. *Canadian Cancer Statistics 2012*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Cancer Society; 2012