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## Medical Cannabis and Its Uses

At our February Support Meeting, Tracey Onuliak gave a presentation on Medical Cannabis. This presentation was quite informative and Tracey was able to answer several questions members had. Members were provided with contact information for the Canadian Cannabis Clinic. Tracey encourages anyone with questions to contact her at 256-7043, or drop by the Clinic at 2813 Arthur Street

## Next Meeting

April 11<sup>th</sup>  
7:00 pm at  
St. Michael's Church  
on Red River Road

## Recruitment Drive - We Need You!

As many of you are aware, one of our Steering Committee member has taken a leave of absence. The Steering Committee is seeking new members to be a part of the Committee. The Steering Committee meets once a month for a one hour meeting. The meetings provide YOU, the Thunder Bay Breast Cancer Support Group with support, guest speakers and organize social functions. If you think you would like to become a Steering Committee member, please talk with any member of the Steering Committee (Gail, Michelle, Christine or Cindy). If you are interested please let us know by emailing [bcs@tbaytel.net](mailto:bcs@tbaytel.net). We look forward to your support!

## Fear of recurrence runs high for triple negative breast cancer patient

by CBCN

### Source

Montreal resident Kelina feels like a "sitting duck" because although researchers are working hard to find treatments for triple negative breast cancer, there are no targeted therapies available to this cancer, which was diagnosed in December 2015.

She had a mastectomy and chemotherapy, but there are no further treatments for her cancer, which is a more aggressive and has a greater possibility of recurrence in the first five years than other forms of the disease.

" I am focusing on the things within my control like eating healthier, exercising regularly, participating in clinical trials when possible, using mindfulness meditation to help me cope, and having regular medical follow-up with my cancer specialists and periodic tests."

Kelina, 51, is a two-time breast cancer survivor. Her first diagnosis was in December 2011 and her second in December 2015. The first cancer was judged 8 percent estrogen receptor positive, and she was treated with chemotherapy, lumpectomy, and radiation. She also took part in a clinical trial to see whether Herceptin would help.

Both times her cancer was Stage II A. The first tumor measured 4.2 cm and the second measured 2.1 cm. Both were in her right breast.

Before cancer, Kelina was a hospital social worker for about 20 years, a job she loved. Now



she is on long-term disability leave because of the lingering cognitive difficulties caused by chemotherapy.

"I don't have as much stamina," she says. "Everything takes more time. I can't multitask or retain information. I can only process one instruction at a time. I forget to turn the stove off. I have a checklist at the front door to make sure I don't forget anything when I go out. I have difficulty thinking of words I want to say. I mistake one object for another. I regularly lose my bus pass, keys, and papers and sometimes get disoriented when I'm out walking or in the metro. I also have limited energy and get fatigued more easily than before."

Kelina says working with her occupational therapist to learn strategies to cope with the cognitive deficits "has been my saving grace."

She is also grateful for the support that she received from family, friends, and neighbours. During her treatments, her sisters called daily, and her brother sent her a treasured gift: a stuffed animal that she had given him 30 years before. Her husband supported her, took care of running the household, and drove her to appointments.

Kelina says having to leave her job is one of the

most difficult parts of being diagnosed with this second breast cancer. "Who am I now and what is my role if I'm not working?" she asks. "It's hard to see colleagues at the hospital where I go for treatment and where I used to work."

Another difficulty was caring for her mother-in-law with Alzheimer's disease at the time of her first cancer diagnosis. It was impossible, so Kelina's mother-in-law was placed in a long-term care facility.

Kelina says she didn't have a great body image before her cancer, but a mastectomy has intensified those feelings. "It is a great adjustment, an ongoing process of adaptation. Although I have experienced a lot of losses along the way, I am so grateful all the specialists, having access to the latest treatments and having a private insurance that supports me and my family.

"It is often hard for me to feel beautiful. My hair didn't grow back totally after the second cancer," she says.

In the end she says, "I focus on being thankful for this body that has supported me twice through cancer treatments."

Depression is another issue for Kelina. "Both bodily and mentally, it makes me feel less able," she says. To cope, she had support from the psychosocial oncology team, and she works on mindfulness and living in the moment, rather than dwelling on the past or fearing the future. She also tries to structure her life to keep her motivated. She takes on projects such as knitting and exercise, and she volunteers at a community library and long-term care facility. "Volunteering makes me feel like I have something to contribute," she says.

She is also doing all she can to learn to advocate for herself so she can be not just a patient, but a partner with her doctors in her cancer care.

Kelina notes that each person who lives with triple negative breast cancer will have their own specific challenges and each will have their own ways of coping.

Overall, Kelina shares that "Although this second cancer had been unpredictable and continues to have many unexpected consequences, I remain hopeful knowing that so much research is ongoing in the field of triple negative breast cancer."



## **10 of My Cancer Lessons to Help You Cope**

**Source**

Having been treated for breast cancer in 2012/13 and working in the field as a therapist, here are 10 of my cancer lessons (in no particular order) that may help you cope with the emotional impact of cancer. But before that, let me say loud and clear:

There is not a single person, story, book, lecture or talk which will teach us all we need to know to understand the impact of cancer on our lives. That's what we have to figure out for ourselves when we go through our own cancer lessons.

1. Cancer and treatment affects us not only physically, but also emotionally, mentally, socially, spiritually, financially, relationally. Be prepared.
2. Struggling with cancer is not a sign of weakness. Cancer like other life-changing illnesses and their treatment is traumatic. It stands to reason. There is no shame. There should be no blame. Self-care and making changes in your private and working life may be the responsible thing to do.
3. You don't need to have cancer to be affected

Related?: Mourning the Child I Never Had Because of Cancer

by cancer. It affects you even if you do not have the disease. Family and friends are impacted, too, and have support needs.

4. The impact of cancer does not end with treatment. Even if in remission, life will never continue the way it was before. Often we are left with treatment side effects, no more regular medical support and with fear of the future. I can be exhausting and cause depression and anxiety.

5. Your cancer experience can lead to unexpected emotions like mood swings, heightened anxiety and anger. Often others and we ourselves may no longer recognize who we are. It can be upsetting. Work it through. Talk it through. You are not alone.

6. Be prepared to be disappointed. Employers, peers, friends and even family may not necessarily be able or willing to give you the support you need.

7. Living with cancer can be lonely. But we remain who we are, cancer or no cancer. Illness can make us invisible if we let it. Hold on to that!

Related: Country Singer Lari White Dies at 52 From Peritoneal Cancer

8. Cancer is unpredictable. Cancer does not necessarily kill because cancer is complex. There are grades and stages, remission, primary, secondary, advanced, terminal. Different cancers have different survival rates. If your cancer returns, it does not necessarily come back in the same area of your body. It all depends. Educate yourself.

9. Try not to pretend nothing has happened. Denial has a limited shelf life. Facing up to your very individual cancer reality is harsh, but in the long-run and if done constructively, can be empowering and enables you to make informed choices.

10. Be an active participant in your own cancer experience and cancer lessons. You have the right to choices. Reach out for help and find

out your rights. Do not expect others (including GPs and employers) to have all the answers and know it all. Engage with cancer support services, to ensure you get what you are entitled to. This can save you money, precious time and energy.

Related: 3 Ways Cancer Can Impact Someone's Mental Health

Every person and every cancer story is different. If my cancer was to return and/or if it was to be terminal, then I may write this piece slightly differently. It stands to reason and that's OK, too. Then there will be more cancer lessons.



## Getting people access to the treatments they need

CBCN TEAM

### Source

There's been a lot of talk lately about new metastatic breast cancer treatments that can greatly extend the lives of many people in Canada. Targeted therapies are changing the landscape for mBC in a big way. Unlike chemotherapy, which delivers treatment to a broad range of cells, targeted therapy delivers treatment to specific cells within your tumour that are fueling its growth. This leads to better treatment outcomes, and less side effects.

CDK4 inhibitors, for example, are targeted therapies that block cyclin dependent kinases (CDK) which regulate cell division. Blocking CDKs stop cells from multiplying and will, therefore, slow down cancer growth<sup>1</sup>. These new types of drugs help treat metastatic hormone positive (HR+) breast cancer.

HR+ is one of the most common subtypes of breast cancer, accounting for up to 70% of cases.

Metastatic breast cancer is always changing, growing and adapting. Over time, it grows to resist the treatment you're using to fight it. For this reason, it's really important for women to have access to treatments that work.

There are thousands of women in Canada who would benefit from receiving treatments like CDK4 inhibitors; however, the drug review process makes it difficult for women to get timely access to these life-extending treatments when they need them. Palbociclib, for example, is a CDK4 inhibitor that is slowly making its way through the Canadian drug approval process. It received its Notice of Compliance from Health Canada in March of 2016 and has just recently finished being reviewed by the pan-Canadian drug approval bodies, meaning it took almost 2 years for it to be reviewed.

Just recently, Palbociclib was added to public formularies in Québec, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan. This means that if you are living in these provinces you will be able to access this treatment. But for the rest of Canada, paying out of pocket or using private insurance is the only option until more provinces add it to their formularies.

## Strawberry Poppy Seed Salad with Chicken

### Source

Prep Time - 10 minutes  
Cooking Time - 0 minutes  
serves - 2

With spring upon us we want time to relax and enjoy the weather. This light, delicious meal is easy to prepare and tastes great!

### Ingredients

- 4 cups mixed salad greens
- 1 cup diced cooked chicken
- 4 large strawberries, hulled and sliced
- 1 ounce goat cheese, crumbled ( $\frac{1}{4}$  cup)
- 3 tablespoons poppy seed dressing
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup chopped toasted pecans (optional)

### Instructions

1. Place greens, chicken, strawberries and goat cheese in a large bowl. Add dressing and toss to coat. Sprinkle with pecans, if desired. Serve at once.

## Butterfly Story Fund

The Butterfly Story fund is now accepting applications! Looking for ways to thrive as a survivor but need a little financial help? The Butterfly Story is here for you! Want to attend the Luncheon of Hope, We-Did exercise classes or another great event? Fill out an application and it will be considered for funding. It can be challenging to ask for help sometimes, but please know the applications are kept in the strictest confidence! If interested, please check out the application form [here](#) OR email [thebutterflystory@hotmail.com](mailto:thebutterflystory@hotmail.com) OR contact Michelle or Shannon to discuss privately.

Palbociclib is not the only cancer treatment that is affected by this slow approval process. Every new treatment drug that comes to Canada must be reviewed and approved by several decision-making bodies. Our 2015 report, Waiting for Treatment, found that a breast cancer treatment can take up to 2 years on average to be approved. It also found that the process is not fully transparent and patient input is not always accounted for. CBCN fully supports the need for new therapies to be reviewed for safety and efficacy; however, we also understand the need to patients to be able to access clinically beneficial medications in a timely manner. To understand more about Canada's lengthy drug approval process, download our infographic [here](#).

CBCN continues to advocate to improve access to important breast cancer treatments. We are actively reaching out to provincial Ministries of Health to ensure that timely access is a priority in their decision-making process. We encourage you do to the same! Write your provincial Minister of Health and tell them how important access to quality treatments for metastatic breast cancer is.

## Upcoming

### Bachelors for Hope Charity

Auction

April 13, 2018

[More info](#)

For Support and  
Encouragement



As fellow support group members, we would be happy to hear from you.

(807) 475-0025 (Voice Mail)  
[bcsgr@tbaytel.net](mailto:bcsgr@tbaytel.net)  
[breastcancersupporttb.com](http://breastcancersupporttb.com)

## Network News

Don't forget to check out the Spring 2017 edition of Outreach News brought to you by the Canadian Breast Cancer Network.

[Click here to check it out!](#)



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