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Raising awareness of pancreatic cancer

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Deadly | Little warning for fourth leading cause of cancer deaths in Canada

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A local woman is hoping an event at the Dr. Everett Chalmers Regional Hospital this week will raise awareness about the need for more research on pancreatic cancer.

ENLARGE PHOTO



The Daily Gleaner/James West Photo
Michelle MacDonald holds up a photo of her father Daniel Ivey. Her father lost his battle to pancreatic cancer three years ago at the age of 56.

About 20 cyclists will roll into the local health-care facility Thursday in support of the Craig's Cause Pancreatic Cancer Society's Maritime Bike Tour - a six-day advocacy effort that will begin at the QEII Health Sciences Centre in Halifax and include a series of information sessions at nine Maritime hospitals.

The group of advocates, clinicians and researchers will join local professionals at each stop to discuss pancreatic cancer, which is the fourth-leading cause of cancer deaths in Canada. They will also talk about the struggles to diagnose the disease in its early stages and current research.

The Fredericton information session, which is open to the public, will be held Thursday at about 1 p.m. in a conference room at the Chalmers hospital.

Pancreatic cancer is a personal issue for Michelle MacDonald.

The Fredericton woman lost her father, Daniel Ivey, to the disease less than two years ago.

She said it all started when he began having pains in his stomach. He decided to get it checked.

"He was having a lot of acid reflux, a lot of stomach pain and no one knew what was wrong with him. He'd been in for several tests at the hospital, had seen a few different doctors and no one could figure it out," she said.

"He was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer on Aug. 27, 2008, and he passed away on Oct. 14, 2008. He never left the hospital after he was diagnosed."

MacDonald said it was a shocking turn of events for her family, which forced them to watch the previously healthy man deteriorate so quickly.

"It was a very painful cancer. It's almost always inoperable, and that's why it's so important to raise awareness. People need to be aware of this cancer and it needs to be diagnosed earlier," she said.

"More research needs to be done. More funding needs to be put into this disease. It's a very serious form of cancer. I realize that all cancers are serious, but this one has a very high mortality rate and you're starting to see more of it."

Pancreatic cancer has one of the poorest survival rates. Only six per cent of patients survive more than five years after the disease has been diagnosed.

MacDonald said there has to be a way to give physicians a better chance of recognizing the small symptoms that appear early in the progression of the disease.

"Doctors need information. If somebody's coming back with persistent pain like my Dad did several times, someone has to say, 'Let's give you a CT scan,'" she said.

"There needs to be better screening and more information needs to be available in the (health-care system)."

She said the gradual move to provincewide electronic health records may make it easier for physicians to see every contact patients have had with the health-care system. That would give them more information about what a person is experiencing and may improve the chances for early diagnoses.

MacDonald said she misses her father every day, but Craig's Cause has been a valuable resource and she hopes this week's event will help people realize that others have gone through the same thing.

"It was great to be able to talk to someone who had been through what I had been through and who had the same type of stories and experiences," she said.

"Craig's Cause has really been great for me. It's helped me through a few tough times and I think it's great for people out there who may not know that there is a support (system) available. We hope a lot of people will show up and learn more about the disease and what they can do to help the fight."

For more information, people can visit the society's website at www.craigscouse.ca.

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My sympathies Michelle. Pancreatic cancer also took my mother's life. She was only thirty-seven and left a son who had just become an RCMP officer, two teen daughters, and an eighteen month old daughter and infant son. She became sick in January, 1971 and passed away April, 1971. This was, probably, one of the best times of her life, and pancreatic cancer took it all away from her, and her from us. It makes me so angry, sometimes I feel I can't live with myself. I get some pleasure in the fact that we, her's and Dad's kids, grew up to be good decent people. In your face, pancreatic cancer!

2 THUMBS UP 0 THUMBS DOWN

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