

Bike tour aiming to raise awareness of pancreatic cancer

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Health: Cyclists scheduled to arrive at Saint John Regional Hospital on Thursday

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SAINT JOHN - Michael Harrigan's daughter died just over a year after she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She was 29.

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Submitted Photo

This team of cyclists with the Craig's Cause Pancreatic Cancer Society heads out today on a six-day tour of the Maritimes to pass out brochures and DVDs about the disease.

Harrigan said his daughter, Krista Hind, a fitness trainer, was in good physical shape, ate a healthy diet, didn't smoke or drink and had no genetic link to the disease.

Today Harrigan will join more than 16 other cyclists with the Craig's Cause Pancreatic Cancer Society to peddle across the Maritimes in six days, stopping at nine hospitals to pass out brochures and DVDs about the deadly cancer.

"Someone in perfect health with no lifestyle risk contracted the disease," said Harrigan, a former Saint John resident who now lives in Halifax.

"If it can strike her it can strike anybody."

Stefanie Condon-Oldreive said the Craig's Cause Pancreatic Cancer Society was formed in 2006 as a way to memorialize her father, Craig Condon, who died eight weeks after his diagnosis, and to give others the information and support her family went without.

"At the time when he was diagnosed we were all frantically looking for information and support groups and they were all American-based," Condon-Oldreive said.

"I don't want other people to go through what we did. People should have a place to go, they should be able to find a spot where they have accurate information."

She said people can now go on their website www.craigsc ause.ca and be linked to research-based information, physicians who will answer questions directly and advocates who will take people through the process. The group also raises money and donates 100 percent of the proceeds to pancreatic cancer research.

Condon-Oldreive said she wants people to know the facts - pancreatic cancer has the highest fatality rate of all cancers, it's the fourth-leading cause of all cancer deaths, one in 79 people will be diagnosed with the disease, less than six per cent will likely survive after five years, most of those diagnosed have a life expectancy of three to nine months and fewer than one per cent of funding for cancer is dedicated to pancreatic cancer.

"There are not the survivors out there pounding on doors," she said. "With a less than six per cent survival rate after five years we don't have the survivors advocating for more support."

This month the family members and friends of those who have suffered with or died from pancreatic cancer will do the advocating. She said the Maritime Bike Tour is expected to travel through New Brunswick on Thursday and is scheduled to stop at the Saint John Regional Hospital at 9 a.m., the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital in Fredericton at 1 p.m., and the Moncton City Hospital at 5 p.m. During each visit the brochures and DVDs will be handed out, and guests will hear from Dr. Mark Walsh, a surgical oncologist, as well as a patient and a caregiver.

"I'm hoping people will know we are out there to help," Condon-Oldreive said.

"I'm hoping we will bring people together and that the material we are handing out will finally give them the answers to the questions they have about their disease. ... We are the voices for the thousands that have died and who cannot speak."

Harrigan said it is important that people are aware of how little of the money raised for cancer goes toward pancreatic cancer. He said people need to be informed so that more funding through organizations and government will be allocated to research pancreatic cancer.

He also wants people to know that the disease is hard to diagnose. He said his daughter had trouble swallowing and fatigue and wasn't diagnosed until it had reached stage four and by then it was too late for surgery.

"This allows me, on behalf of my family members, to be a voice for Krista," Harrigan said.

"If she was here, as a survivor she would be doing the same thing. I think she is proud of all of her family members, her husband (Simon Hind) in particular and her mom (Jeannie Graham), who was by her side every step of the way."

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