



Simcoe Muskoka Regional Cancer Program Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC) Newsletter

The Summer 2022 Edition

This summer edition of the PFAC newsletter is written with caregivers in mind. We wanted to recognize the special role a caregiver has in the cancer journey. Inside, you will find stories of inspiration, and words of wisdom as they have been offered as a way to support YOU as well as the person for whom you are caring.

Meet PFAC Member Rick Webster (Caregiver Extraordinaire)



I first became aware of PFAC when my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2018. More devastating news is hard to imagine. Throughout the process of treatment and recovery, I became more and more aware of the outstanding and impressive cancer patient care at RVH. I should also mention that not long after that (2019) I was the recipient of an angioplasty at RVH, once again, phenomenal care. I decided that if I could give back, I should and would.

It is very enlightening to sit (presently), as the only male on the PFAC committee. I get to feel the deep emotions of the females who taken on the cancer journey with determination and kindness. Caregivers always have a different and important contribution to patient care. Many couples have quite established roles in their partnerships. When one of them gets sick it throws a whole new dynamic on those roles. It's a great pleasure to feel like the caregiver is being heard on the Council. My wish would be that more males would join me to share either their cancer patient or their caregiver journey.

Life's as busy as you want to make it. After raising three great girls, retirement from business ownership in 2009 left me with time to give back to the wonderful community of Elmvale, Springwater Township, and Barrie. From 2010-2014, I was fortunate to be trusted with the Ward 3 Councillor position in Springwater. I recently finished up a year as a board member on the College of Pharmacy. Presently my activities and interests include sitting on the Springwater Committee of Adjustment, Board of the Elmvale Food Bank, and the Elmvale District Lion's Club. I have also been accepted to sit on a provincial committee that reviews applications for Justices of the Peace. I guess you could say I'm busy.

My wife Kim and I are active members of the Barrie Country Club. I like to get a fishing rod in my hand as much as possible and enjoy reading all things political as well as a good “quick read” novel. My best days are when our friends drop by for an afternoon visit and the exhilarating feeling of seeing the next generation on your lap; I have recently been granted the great privilege of grandparenting. This feeling is only superseded with having your own children and a mere handful of the other miracles of life.

My greatest accomplishment as a result of my involvement with PFAC is the emotional comfort I can offer my many friends and relatives, who are caregivers and just need to talk. Mostly, and often, they are so engrossed in it that they don't even know what they don't know. To be able to have a bit of knowledge regarding the system and some experience as a caregiver, a good chat over a cold one often goes a long way on a lonely road.

Please join us on the Council! WE are just a friendly bunch who care. Visit <https://www.rvh.on.ca/careers/patient-family-advisory-council-opportunities/> for more information.

It is Important to Care for the Caregiver

Written by PFAC member Brenda McAuley

Being a caregiver. It's a difficult job. It can be lonely and exhausting. And often underappreciated. But it's oh, so necessary. When someone is sick and scared, they need a rock to help them through the journey. And because they're sick and scared, it's not surprising that they may not express the appreciation that they truly feel. I don't know how I would have managed if it were not for my husband and my friends.

It's easy to forget that the caregiver has to stay healthy too. To learn tips on how to care for the caregiver, PFAC members invited Gilda's Club of Simcoe Muskoka to speak to us about the top care tips for patients and caregivers and we are sharing that information with you!



**GILDA'S
CLUB
SIMCOE
MUSKOKA**

An Affiliate of the

CANCER SUPPORT COMMUNITY

Gilda's Club Simcoe Muskoka is located around the corner from Simcoe Muskoka Regional Cancer Centre, and if you haven't visited them, we highly recommend you do. Their beautiful and welcoming clubhouse for both patients and their family members might be just the thing you need to lift your spirits. The phone number is 705-725-5199 (call first to ensure they are open).

Gilda's free membership and cancer support system is designed to decrease cancer related stress and ensure that no one faces cancer alone. Their services, including support groups, movement classes, social events, educational workshops and more, work as a complement to medical care.

Introducing Erin King: Gilda's Club Simcoe Muskoka



In keeping with the theme of the summer newsletter, I reached out to Gilda's Club of Simcoe Muskoka and was introduced to Program Coordinator, Erin King. I asked how and when she got started with Gilda's and to explain to me a bit about her position there.



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Erin explained: "I actually started with Gilda's Club Simcoe Muskoka as a placement student while I was completing my Bachelor of Social Work Degree. I felt very passionate about Gilda's Club and the mission of this organization. A few months after I graduated university, I was hired on as a staff member. I have been with Gilda's Club Simcoe Muskoka since 2015 and currently work as the Program Coordinator."

I then asked Erin to tell me about her background, and maybe some personal tidbits. She explained that she first graduated from Georgian College's Social Service Worker Program before completing her Bachelor of Social Work Degree with Honours from Laurentian University. Erin has lived in the Simcoe Muskoka area all her life and wanted to focus her career on working within a community that she loves so much. She is so grateful to be able to work and live in this beautiful area.

Membership with Gilda's Club is open to anyone whose life has been impacted by cancer – the person with the diagnosis, friends and family, and those who have had a loved one die from cancer. Gilda's Club also provide post-treatment support. I think the main reason people join Gilda's Club is to connect with others who are also impacted by cancer. Membership with Gilda's Club allows for a lot of flexibility and can really be tailored to what cancer support looks like for each person. Gilda's Club offers a variety of support/networking groups, workshops, lectures, movement classes, art classes and social opportunities to connect with other Members.

Making that first connection to Gilda's Club is one of the hardest steps. For those who are hesitant or unsure if Gilda's Club is the right fit for them, Erin encourages them to start by exploring their website which provides information on all the programs and services. People can also view the Gilda's program calendar which highlights all the activities currently offered. To begin the membership process or for more information about Gilda's Club, call the Clubhouse at 705-726-5199 or send them an email through their website: <https://gildasclubsimcoemuskoka.org/become-a-member>.

Frequently Asked Questions about Gilda's Club

Q: Is there a cost to access Gilda's Club?

A: Everything at Gilda's Club (including membership and all our services) are absolutely free.

Q: Can those who live and/or receive cancer treatment outside the Simcoe Muskoka area become a Gilda's Club Member?

A: Absolutely, our virtual programming is a great option for Members outside the Barrie area to feel connected and receive support from Gilda's Club Simcoe Muskoka. Since introducing our virtual services, Gilda's Club Simcoe Muskoka has welcomed Members from all over Ontario.

Q: Is Gilda's Club Simcoe Muskoka providing only virtual services right now?

A: Currently, Gilda's Club Simcoe Muskoka has both in-person and virtual services to help suit the needs of our cancer support community. The Gilda's Club Clubhouse is on a modified open schedule. More information about our in-person safety protocols can be found on our website.

Finally, I asked Erin if she had any memorable experiences she could share? She said, "One of the most beautiful parts of Gilda's Club is that members can come as they are. Laughter, tears and everything in between are welcomed and valid at Gilda's Club. Gilda's Club Simcoe Muskoka is a community of support that understands cancer, including the challenges and successes that can come with the cancer journey."

Tips for Caring for a Cancer Patient

When offering emotional support to a cancer patient:

- Listen first and allow them to decide how much to share
- Don't offer advice unless asked
- Their feelings are valid, positivity isn't always best
- It's okay to not know what to say

When offering practical support to a cancer patient:

- Be specific and honest about what you can provide including transportation, cleaning the house, walking the dog, childcare, providing meals
- Ask before visiting, don't drop by
- Be the person of contact - if the patient wants this
- Be present at appointments but remember this is the patient's appointment and their concerns are primary
- Record or make notes during the appointment if this is okay with the patient
- Ask what the patient would like to gain from you being at the appointment

Caring for the Caregiver

The caregiver is going through a cancer journey too. Try these self-care tips:

- Pace yourself and respect your own limits. You can't be everything to everyone.
- Make time for your needs, your hobbies, interests and time away
- Consider taking caregiver leave if this is an option for you
- Enlist the help of others
- Create a helping calendar or have a list of ongoing chores that need to be done
- Reach out for professional support and join caregiver support groups in the area
- Research what community and in-house supports are available

Resources

Cancer Support Community: <https://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/caregivers>

- A variety of information and resources including questions to ask the doctor, questions to ask about treatments, tips for being a caregiver, tips for the caregiver, talking to children about cancer, supporting a loved one from a distance

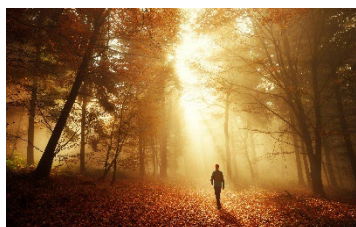
Canadian Cancer Society: <https://cancer.ca/en/>

- Information on programs available through the CCS, government programs, information on different types of cancer, tips for supporting a loved on with cancer

A Few Words of Inspiration

Let us answer when life calls – Written by PFAC member Stacey LePage

I wrote this poem when I was undergoing my first set of chemotherapy. I found a lot of inspiration from my morning walks (at 5:30 am!) with my husband. Nature helped to ground me and writing helped to sort me out.



Walk with me to a hopeful place where wishes can come true, and let us wish together, friend, for a hopeful, healthy “you”. Though few the years upon this earth, you’ve been through many things - when cancer came to silence you, instead it made you sing. Come walk with me through fields of joy and bask in appreciation. Let the winds blow gently on your face as you turn towards the sun. Look upwards, upwards, towards the sky, there is a clear light that shines. Have hope, my friend, that again one day, such happiness you’ll find. Come walk with me straight on till dusk, till our shadows draw quite long - and see that life’s been kind to us, we’ve sung a glorious song. So much awaits each day for us as we waken from our sleep.

Have faith, have hope, have courage that our lives are ours to keep. Come walk with me, please come alive, and look beyond those walls. Life is big – life is bold - let us answer when it calls.

What's New at the Cancer Centre: my health care patient portal.

Written by PFAC staff member Susanna Wong

my
health care



- ✓ View & pre-register upcoming appointments
- ✓ See your visit history
- ✓ Review lab & imaging results
- ✓ Access reports
- ✓ Update personal info
- ✓ Share info with family & caregivers

As of June 14, patients and their caregivers are able to access medical records, lab results and appointment information online via the **my health care** patient portal. Our PFAC members were busy over the last month test driving the portal before it was launched to the public. We're thrilled with its ability to inform us of our upcoming appointments and access our health records and lab results.

To learn more and sign up for the my health care patient portal, please visit: <http://care-4.ca/my-health-care-patient-portal/>

A note about viewing your upcoming appointments: for cancer patients of the Simcoe Muskoka Regional Cancer Program, you will not be able to see your Cancer Program appointments in the patient portal. This is because Cancer Program appointments are managed via a different electronic medical record system that is not currently linked to the patient portal. However, you will be able to see any other appointments that occur at RVH, such as your imaging and surgery appointments. We are working on a solution to allow Cancer Program appointments to appear in the patient portal. Stay tuned!

A Little Bit of Humour for a Caregiver Giggle...



Join us to help improve cancer care for the future! For more information:
<https://www.rvh.on.ca/careers/patient-family-advisory-council-opportunities/>

A Taste of Summer: Strawberry Salad

Written by PFAC caregiver member Willa Hart

There is nothing better to greet the taste buds in the summer than strawberries. Well, blueberries, raspberries and watermelon are pretty good too! Indulge yourself, you care-giver you! Take time for yourself and make something on occasion that YOU enjoy. This was one of my favorite recipes when I was caring for my husband and I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

Ingredients



- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 cup sliced strawberries
- 1 cup halved cherry tomatoes
- 1 cup halved mini mozzarella balls
- 1 ripe avocado, pitted and diced



- ⅓ cup pecans, toasted
- ⅓ cup loosely packed basil, torn or baby spinach
- Extra-virgin olive oil for drizzling
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Instructions

- In a small saucepan, bring the balsamic vinegar to a high simmer over medium heat. Stir, then reduce the heat to low and simmer until the vinegar has thickened and reduced by half, about 8 to 10 minutes. Set aside to cool.
- Place the strawberries, cherry tomatoes, mozzarella, avocado, pecans and basil in a shallow bowl or platter. Drizzle with olive oil, and season generously with salt and pepper. Gently toss. Drizzle with the reduced balsamic.

Summer Programs to Lift Your Spirits!

Canoe4Cancer <https://www.algonquinparkcanoetrips.com/canoe4cancer.html>

Information provided by the Canoe4Cancer team



“Immersing oneself in nature, via canoe, makes people feel good. And people battling cancer can benefit, more than most, from feeling good in nature. Since the Algonquin Adventure Tours team has intimate experience with the realities of advanced cancer, we wanted to use our knowledge to provide beneficial experiences to patients in need. A little awe-inspiring beauty, inspiration, and the sense of accomplishment from successful wilderness travel, can go a long way in improving a patient's spirit.

Participants usually join Stuart Lorne Letovsky (AAT founder, head guide and stage 4b parotid salivary gland cancer survivor) on a VIP canoe tour. Patients, or their friends/family, should contact Algonquin Adventure Tours to discuss their adventure options. Stuart's successful cancer battle has involved chemo, radiation and a dozen operations including partial lung & total facial nerve removal. Despite several spinal fractures, facial paralysis and reduced mobility/sight/hearing, Stuart has overcome all and continues to guide daily in Algonquin Park.

Trips are free for patients (and one guest) who are actively undergoing chemo or radiations treatments at the time of their tour. If you or someone you know could benefit from the Algonquin Adventure Tours Canoe4Cancer Program, please visit our website above for more information.”

Cottage Dreams Initiative <https://cottagedreams.ca/>



This initiative helps families touched by cancer by offering cancer survivors and their families an opportunity to spend a week at a donated cottage. This much needed time away with survivors, their friends and families, allows them to reflect and celebrate recovery.

The program had to temporarily close during COVID, however, it has since developed protocols and procedures for both guests and cottage owners to keep everyone as safe as possible. Any additions the cottage owners wish to add will be added on their listing.

Cottage Dreams is now accepting applications for the 2022 season. For more information, please refer to the website listed above.