

Centre of life

New cancer clinic at Markham Stouffville Hospital creates a feeling of community for patients

Last New Year's Eve, Amy Lai found out she had breast cancer. It was the end of a scary year. She had found the lump around March, was told it was benign and had gone back to her doctor in October after she felt the lump growing larger and harder. Several mammograms and ultrasounds later, Lai got the news.

The 50-year-old, who is the administrative assistant to the dean at the University of Toronto's faculty of medicine, had a mastectomy on Valentine's Day before being sent to Markham Stouffville Hospital (MSH), in her hometown, for chemotherapy.

Lai is one of the reasons for the CIBC Celebration of Hope, which is marking its 25th anniversary this year, on Oct. 27. Launched as part of the cancer awareness movement, this annual luncheon celebrates cancer survivors like Lai and features high-profile names such as actress Lisa Ray and Dr. Marla Shapiro, who share their own survival stories. The event is also a fundraiser for the hospital and, to date, has brought in \$1.9 million.

This year, the money raised will go toward the hospital's new cancer centre and its goal to help meet rising demand from the region as a result of an increasing population and aging boomers.

"The need to focus on cancer care in this community has been growing overwhelmingly for the last 10 years," says Pauline Brillinger, the clinical manager of breast health and oncology at Markham Stouffville Hospital, "and the size of the clinic we have is far too small to appropriately service the growing population." Originally built with a local population of 110,000 in mind, MSH now serves almost 350,000.

The new cancer centre will open in the old emergency department building, a location with ample space. Private space for doctors, previously given up to make room for patient care, will be brought back, and patients in the area will be able to bring their families to appointments.

"Our community was recently designated the most ethnically diverse in Canada, and with the communities that make up that diversity, we find that families are much larger and multi-generational," says Suzette Strong, CEO of the Markham Stouffville Hospital Foundation. "So, we've accommodated that [factor] in the space."

The centre also features an ambitious design. "We wanted to improve the environment for our patients because we think

that supports wellness," says Dr. Mateya Trinkaus, Lai's doctor and an oncologist at the hospital.

The walls will be painted in warm colours, and the focal point will be a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows that let in natural light. While receiving chemotherapy, patients will look out the windows, at a garden, and a fireplace will enhance the homey feel.

"We're trying really hard to make sure it has warmth," says Strong, "to balance hygiene and health with comfort and care." The centre's location also benefits from having an exclusive entrance, so patients receiving chemotherapy, who have compromised immune systems, don't have to walk through the hospital.

Over the past two decades, cancer care has improved immensely, and for many cancers the chances of survival are now significantly higher. Treatment is now more individualized for each patient, Dr. Trinkaus explains, and over the last 10 years, doctors have turned to a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to fighting cancer.

Chemotherapy itself has improved, she says, along with the ability of doctors to manage side effects, such as nausea. As a result, patients are more comfortable and also more likely to complete the full treatment, thereby increasing the chance of survival.

The new patient-focused centre will follow the model created by the hospital's Breast Health Centre in 2007. "We were among the first to have a 'one-stop shop,' where patients come for a mammogram, may have a biopsy and see a surgeon," says Strong. "We've seen some really positive results, saving women who have a lump, from sleepless nights, and getting right to the treatment outcomes."

The Breast Health Centre was also among the first facilities to provide nurse navigators who help patients by coordinating all their appointments and tests and answering their questions, essentially walking them through the process.

"Our new patient-focused centre is a place where, when you walk through the front door, we know your first name," says Dr. Trinkaus.

Lai says Dr. Trinkaus and the nurses at the chemotherapy clinic made the experience of receiving treatment better than she had feared it would be.

"They were so nice and friendly. They were always there for me. That's a good experience, and as a patient I appreciate it very much."

Visit msh.on.ca for more information.

FRASER DOUGLAS



Amy Lai benefited greatly from the chemotherapy clinic in her hometown of Markham. She found that the staff at Markham Stouffville Hospital were always on hand and made her feel comforted. "They were always there for me," she says.

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Vital signs

- Over the next 10 years, 40 per cent more Ontarians will be living with cancer.
- 172 people were diagnosed with cancer every day in 2007; by 2017 that number will rise to 228.
- Breast cancer comprises 26 per cent of new cancer cases in women.
- The five-year survival rate for breast cancer is 88 per cent.
- Breast cancer deaths have decreased in Ontario by 37 per cent between 1990 and 2008 for women 50 to 70 years old.
- Up to 50 per cent of cancers can be prevented.
- 88 per cent of those who develop cancer are over 50.



THIS IS PART 1 OF A 4-PART SERIES.
LOOK FOR "MENTAL HEALTH" ON SAT., OCT. 26.

RAFFLE OF HOPE

Draw takes place 3 p.m., Sunday, October 27, 2013

www.mshf.on.ca

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Cash, credit or cheque payable to Markham Stouffville Hospital Foundation. Draw takes place 3 p.m., Sunday, October 27, 2013 at the Hilton Toronto/Markham Suites Conference Centre & Spa
25th Anniversary CIBC Celebration of Hope Luncheon
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