



**NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

Physicians discuss challenges of providing Palliative Care

For immediate release – May 5, 2010

St. John's, NL – The Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association today held its sixth public information session to discuss the challenges of providing and accessing palliative care in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The panel was chaired by Dr. Susan MacDonald, Divisional Chief of Palliative Care for Eastern Health, and included St. John's family physician Dr. Patrick O'Shea and Gander family physician Dr. Eileen St. Croix.

Palliative care aims to relieve suffering and improve the quality of life for people who are living with or dying from advanced life-threatening illness.

"I see patients in my clinics, on wards of the hospital, in long-term care facilities and in their homes. My job is to help ease the suffering my patients experience and assist them in living the best way possible," said Dr. MacDonald

"Unfortunately, many people come into hospital, sometimes unnecessarily, because they don't have family physicians or they have a family physician that is so strapped that they cannot provide palliative care. Many patients end up in the emergency room and get stuck in a bed in a hospital because they don't have access to care in their community," she added.

Dr. St. Croix explained that people living in rural areas have severely limited access to comprehensive palliative care services leaving the majority of individuals and their families without much needed support.

"The ideal of palliative care is to support our patients through their journey in that environment as long as they and their family so desire and their care can be adequately provided. Unfortunately, many rural Newfoundlanders must leave their homes for institutional care earlier than they desire due to inconsistencies in enhanced home nursing services and a lack of family physicians," said Dr. St. Croix.

Dr. O'Shea noted that while people living in St. Johns have greater access to palliative care services, not all patients are able to avail of comprehensive and coordinated palliative care.

"I am restricted to the number of palliative care patients that I can look after. I can only take on two or three patients requiring palliative care at one time because I am still running a full-time family practice and I'm also looking after nursing home patients," said Dr. O'Shea.

"You can easily become overwhelmed, especially when you have to make emergency house calls during your clinic hours, leaving a waiting room full of patients who are then forced to wait even longer," Dr. O'Shea explained.

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Dr. MacDonald is a palliative care physician with previous training in both family medicine and nursing. She has practiced palliative medicine in Newfoundland and Labrador for the past 13 years and is currently the Divisional Chief of Palliative Care for Eastern Health. She is also an Associate Professor of Medicine and Family Medicine at Memorial University and she sits on the board of the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians.

Dr. St. Croix has practiced rural family medicine in Newfoundland and Labrador for the past 34 years, including Bonavista, Stephenville, Twillingate and Gander. She is a graduate of Memorial University and is a Preceptor for Memorial University medical students. She currently practices at the cancer clinic in Gander supervising chemotherapy and providing palliative care in the Central Health region.

Dr. O'Shea has practiced family medicine in St. John's for the past 28 years. He co-founded the Newfoundland Drive Family Practice, providing comprehensive care to more than 12,000 patients, including evenings and weekends. Dr. O'Shea provides office care as well as minor surgical procedures and palliative care. He continues to provide house calls and is a staff member of two nursing homes. Dr. O'Shea is also a Clinical Associate Professor of Family Medicine at Memorial University and has been involved in teaching residents for 15 years. He is currently the president-elect of the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association.

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