

Dr. Eileen St. Croix
Palliative Care Media Statement
May 5, 2010

Palliative Care for me exemplifies Family Practice, as it is the total care of a person who has an end of life illness. This is achieved by coordinating with the patient, their family, nursing and allied health professionals to provide comfort and quality of life in the final days of their earthly journey.

In rural Newfoundland it is a challenge to fulfill this mandate due to a multiplicity of reasons, some of which we cannot change such as geography, weather and diagnosis and other variables such as home support and nursing and physician availability which hopefully we can change. We all realize that we are most comfortable and content in our familiar home environment. 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 desired due to inconsistencies in enhanced home nursing services and family physician availability. They are then admitted to hospital, not to a Palliative care unit as these exist only in Corner Brook and St. John's, where they will be cared for by a physician whom they have never met before. Their families are often 1-2 hours drive from home and this adds to their stress. I do care for patients who live as far as 100km from Gander and do go to see them at home and coordinate with very dedicated home care nurses in their care but it is demanding due to time and especially winter driving conditions. It also requires that I be available 24 hours a day. If one is a solo physician in a rural area this is quite difficult with all the other demands of practice.

To provide good Palliative Care in 2010 Family Physicians must be part of a team of home care and hospital nursing, social work, pharmacy and pastoral care personnel who are dedicated to this need. These teams need to be organized through the province and family physicians with special interest and training in Palliative Care must be available to be leaders in this endeavor. To do this we need consistent family physicians in rural areas who are happy to become part of their communities and share in the lives of the residents.