



CanWell partnership helps cancer survivors regain fitness and strength

A new partnership is helping cancer survivors regain strength and improve their physical well-being through an exercise and education program offered at the Les Chater Family YMCA.

CanWell is a unique program created by health professionals in Hamilton Health Sciences' Oncology Rehabilitation Program including Fidelma Serediuk, Chief of Physiotherapy Practice, Oren Cheifetz, physiotherapist, and Jan Park Dorsay, Advanced Practice Nurse, along with partners Linda Woodhouse, Assistant Professor, McMaster University and Genevieve Hladysz Community Health Program Development, YMCA. The team worked together to develop a pilot project to support a high-quality program that is delivered in the community.

CanWell was built upon a solid foundation of research that shows physical activity such as aerobic conditioning, strengthening and/or stretching is both safe and beneficial for people living with cancer.

The benefits of exercise and increased physical activity include maintenance or increase in lean body mass and physical function, reduction of fatigue caused by the disease and the cancer treatment, improvements in mood and quality of life, improved survival of people with cancer, prevention of new cancers, and earlier detection of cancer.

CanWell offers cancer survivors the opportunity to learn about exercise from experts and participate in a safe and supervised exercise program in the comfort of their own community. It will help to reduce the gap that currently exists in helping cancer survivors regain their pre-cancer physical abilities and resume a more active role within their community.

The program reached capacity within the first few weeks that CanWell began and participants have already expressed praise for the pilot program.

"I find that, for me, there is a good balance between safety, exercise, learning and having fun. With the gentle and supportive encouragement of the CanWell Team I am achieving good results," said Joanne Colburne. "I feel that my personal strength



Building strength – *CanWell is an unique new program for people living with cancer, providing participants with a fitness program developed by Hamilton Health Sciences' cancer rehabilitation experts in the convenience of the YMCA, where specially trained staff are on-hand to ensure the participants' safety. From left – Oren Cheifetz, physiotherapist at Hamilton Health Sciences joins CanWell participant, Nancy Kowalchuk and Genevieve Hladysz, Community Health Program Development Centre Director of the YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford.*

and stamina has improved since starting this program and look forward to my continued success."

The CanWell program is part of Hamilton Health Sciences' larger vision to develop health promotion, disease prevention and chronic disease management programs in partnership with the YMCA. Like other HHS/YMCA programs, the CanWell pilot project was planned to be transferable, so that other YMCAs or community programs can use the materials and duplicate the exercise programs far beyond Hamilton for the benefit of cancer survivors across Ontario.

"As acute care hospital resources become scarcer, we need to increase and improve the number of high-quality programs that are available in the community to support people throughout their cancer journey," said Dr. Bill Evans, President, Juravinski Cancer Centre. "CanWell is an example of the power of hospital/community collaboration that benefits cancer survivors, while simultaneously

building the capacity of our community-based programs."

The CanWell pilot received \$250,000 funding from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to develop the program, but the plan is that the pilot will lead to ongoing programming for cancer survivors offered in the community through the YMCA.

When the pilot is complete at the end of 2009, cancer survivors will be able to access this program through the regular YMCA membership upon referral from their oncologist. The YMCA also offers financial assistance for those in need.

"We look forward to working with Hamilton Health Sciences on the continued roll-out of CanWell and providing a self-sustaining, client-centered program to provide cancer survivors with optimal physical wellness," said Jim Commerford, President and CEO of the YMCA. "It is yet another way we are all working to build a stronger, healthier community."

