Program aims to manage chronic health problems

Nova Scotia has one of the highest rates of chronic disease and disability in Canada

BY GAIL SLOANE, RN
Chronic disease management coordinator

A self-management program for Nova Scotians with chronic health problems is on its way to be in place in all district health authorities across the province. Your Way to Wellness is based on the Stanford Chronic Disease Self-Management Program. The Department of Health and Wellness began coordinating and funding the program in 2008. The program is free and gives those who suffer from chronic illness, and their family members, the tools they need to lead healthy, active and fulfilling lives.

Dr. Peter MacDougall, director of the Nova Scotia Chronic Pain Collaborative Care Network, said the Your Way to Wellness program gives his patients the confidence and skills to better live with their chronic pain.

"If they have a flare plan when the pain worsens, they have the ability to work through it until I can see them," said Dr. MacDougall.

"And the goal setting, flexibility—living lifestyle changes that improve their overall health and sense of well-being," he added.

Nova Scotia has one of the highest rates of chronic disease and disability in Canada. Approximately 66 percent of Nova Scotians report having a chronic condition, and this number jumps to 90 percent in Nova Scotians over the age of 65. In 2007-08, Nova Scotia led the country in seven out of 11 chronic diseases including arthritis, anxiety, bowel disorders, heart disease, mood disorder, respiratory diseases and stroke. Nova Scotia ranked second for hypertension, third in cancer and diabetes, and eighth for the effects of smoke.

These findings are significant, both from a quality of life and economic perspective, and have a significant impact on future health care planning. In the past, the approach to chronic pain management has been reactive and provider-driven instead of proactive and patient-driven.

The Your Way to Wellness program addresses chronic disease in an approachable, patient-centred manner. It acknowledges that although different chronic conditions may have different physical impacts on the body, many sufferers share similar problems like difficulties with daily activities, interacting with the health-care system, and communicating with family and friends.

"Each of us has different illnesses but the same emotional distress such as frustration, anger, depression, or sense of helplessness," said one former patient. "I learned to deal with the symptoms to attain to achieve the greatest possible physical capability and pleasure from life, and positive ways to manage my illness." Any Nova Scotia with a chronic condition such as arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, mental illness, fibromyalgia, chronic pain, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and/or degenerative disease can attend a Your Way to Wellness session.

For more information, contact:
Gail Sloane
Chronic disease management coordinator
(902) 424-7805 (office)
gail.sloane@gov.ns.ca
Your Way to Wellness ns.gov.ca

Collaborative teams

Family practice nurses on the rise in Nova Scotia

RNs trained to meet needs of patients across the life span

BY TANYA MAGEE, RN; CORINNE HODDER-MALLODY, RN; DEE MASON

A number of family physicians in Nova Scotia hiring family practice nurses to work in fee-for-service practices is steadily increasing, thanks to support for new collaborative teams. The Family Practice Nursing Program, provided through the Registered Nurses Professional Development Centre (RNPDC), trains RNs for the needs of patients and families across the life span in primary care settings.

"Patients in my practice have noted this care feels different," said Dr. Ajunna Jayatharan, a family physician in Halifax. Dr. Jayatharan said she and her family practice nurse Terry MacEachren communicate regularly to develop motivational behavior approaches that are grounded in common sense to help guide people toward healthy goals.

She said patients and families are reaping benefits from this practice model, with shorter waits for regular and urgent appointments as well as additional time for education, guidance, counseling and lifestyle modification.

Family practice nurses are often better suited to participate in the care planning process. This will reduce the demand for care provider interventions and reduce the development of secondary chronic diseases.

For more information, contact:
Gail Sloane
Chronic disease management coordinator
(902) 424-7805 (office)
gail.sloane@gov.ns.ca
Your Way to Wellness ns.gov.ca

I can’t help but feel that this type of nursing is truly making a difference in people’s health. This is what nursing is about.

Terry MacEachren
Family practice nurse