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October 15, 2025

Cancer Support: Gaining Agency Through Information

When a physician discloses a cancer diagnosis to their patient, it is not news anyone wants to hear. The moment those words are in the air, the patient may sink into a flurry of thoughts, fears, questions, and doubts. They may not hear anything else the physician says in that appointment.

Cancer is the second highest diagnosis category in the BCPVPA's long-term disability plan. When I speak to members going through cancer treatments, they often provide feedback that they feel they have no control. As successful leaders who are planners, organizers, and doers, they are experiencing a shift to being on the schedule of the medical system, from the timing of appointments and the onset of treatment, to awaiting test results and learning next steps. Limited control in their healing journey can feel like an unexpected burden that accompanies the diagnosis.

We are empowered when we feel we have a degree of agency and control. When it comes to cancer information and resources, we are fortunate to live in a province that is known for its cancer research and treatment success.

Access to Information and Support

The BC Cancer Agency has amazing resources available to individuals and families coping with and recovering from cancer, including:

- The BC Cancer Library, which encompasses cancer treatment, clinical trials, coping, information for children, resources in different languages, relaxation techniques, and more.

- Information beyond conventional cancer treatments, which are referred to as complementary and alternative medicine. Complementary therapies are products and practices used in conjunction with conventional treatment.
- Nutrition information to help with treatment side effects and weight management.
- Patient and family counselling services to help individuals, with guidance on understanding your emotions, having discussions with loved ones, assisting with treatment decisions, and other important topics.
- Information about community services, support groups specific to different cancers, interpreters, and financial assistance.
- Pain and symptom management, and details regarding palliative care.
- A full-service pharmacy for both in and outpatients. Outpatient cancer treatment medications are provided free of charge. Patients have access to medication counselling and review, and drug information services.
- Prevention programs that promote healthy living to reduce risks from some cancers.
- Telehealth technology to allow individuals, through videoconferencing, to see and speak with a healthcare professional at the cancer centre.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the services provided by the BC Cancer Agency:

Access to Information and Support

Another way some people may seek to increase agency in their personal health situation is to participate in research, including clinical trials.

There are research projects, like the [BC Generations Project](#), where anyone can participate in one of BC's largest-ever health studies where the goal is to learn more about how environments, lifestyle, and genes contribute to cancer and other chronic diseases. Health professionals may have information on research projects that are underway.

There are clinical trials which are carefully designed investigations of a new device, treatment, technique or combination of treatment in human patients. Trials may focus on prevention, screening, or treatment, and can be beneficial to those participating through access to new medications, and enhanced medical attention. Patients can ask their health professional whether their specific health condition and circumstances make them a candidate for a clinical trial.

To learn more – go to <http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/our-research/participate/clinical-trials>

Donation

Most of us know someone who has been impacted by cancer, and we may not know how to help. Depending upon your relationship with the patient, there may be day-to-day supports to help someone going through treatment and recovery. Often our ability to help may be through volunteering or donating. We can donate to different areas of cancer research through the [BC Cancer Foundation](#). We can also donate to help people with cancer to travel for treatment through organizations such as the [Canadian Cancer Society](#).

Gratitude

British Columbia has an "A" grade for cancer mortality when compared to other countries, and is considered a top-performing region for cancer research and care, with high survival rates and leading research facilities. The BC Cancer Research Institute is internationally recognized for its work in genomics, personalized medicine, and clinical trials, making it a hub for translating research into better patient outcomes. The University of British Columbia's strong performance in medicine and health, including a focus on cancer, also contributes to the province's leading position in the field.

If you, or someone close to you, receives the difficult news of a cancer diagnosis, you will experience some of the best care in the world, with support as you navigate treatment plans and schedules, and next steps. We hope that these links and resources will help support you and those you care about during a difficult time.

Other Sources

<https://cancer.ca/en/treatments/clinical-trials/clinical-trial-benefits-risks-and-costs>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Morandini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rochelle Morandini

Member Health & Well-Being, Director

If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpya.bc.ca.