

The Princess Margaret  
Cancer Foundation  **UHN**

# IMPACT REPORT

**Advancing Diversity Initiatives and Communication Support  
for Cancer Patients**

**Prepared for Carley's Angels Foundation**

**July 2022**

## A MESSAGE FROM DR. GARY RODIN

Dear Riley,

As one of the top five cancer research centres in the world, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre is an internationally recognized leader in cancer research and clinical care for patients and their caregivers. We understand the urgent need for cancer care that is not only medically rigorous, but also empathic, inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible for all.

Our aim is for patients at The Princess Margaret and throughout the world to feel informed, supported and understood by their care teams throughout their entire journey. This is why we have launched a dedicated, one-of-a-kind Cancer Experience Program.

The Cancer Experience Program was created to ensure that essential information and guidance, along with access to health care providers and specialized support programs, is readily available to patients and their loved ones. These programs take into account the special needs of diverse cultural groups and marginalized communities, as well as those with challenges related to physical or mental health, or complex cancer treatment. Our aim is to create and disseminate a standard of excellence in supportive care that matches our other world-class cancer therapies.

We are most grateful for the Carley's Angels Foundation's investment in our Cancer Experience Program, specifically in health equity and supportive communication initiatives. These projects will help reduce barriers to accessing clinical trials and ensure healthcare providers have the skills they need to provide effective and empathic communication to their patients. Thank you for your trust and vision.

Sincerely,



Dr. Gary Rodin

Director of Cancer Experience, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre

## THE PRINCESS MARGARET: A GLOBAL POWERHOUSE

Princess Margaret Cancer Centre is a global leader in advancing research, treatment and quality of life for patients and families across the entire cancer spectrum. With more than 1,300 research staff and over 60 years of global cancer innovation to advance research and patient care, clinicians and scientists at The Princess Margaret have changed what the world knows about cancer.

From Drs. James Till and Ernest McCulloch's discovery of stem cells in 1961 to Drs. Scott Bratman and Daniel De Carvalho's more recent breakthrough in the early detection of cancer with a simple blood test, The Princess Margaret continues to redefine our understanding of cancer and how we treat it.



As the largest cancer centre in Canada, The Princess Margaret is uniquely positioned to have global impact. The Princess Margaret is strengthened by more than 500 international research partnerships in over 100 countries, and operates one of the world's largest clinical trials programs. Our proven track record of seminal discoveries has benefitted patients at the local, provincial, national and international levels.

Our priority is to elevate the experience of cancer patients, while ensuring cancer care is inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible for all. To give these goals the visibility, commitment and resources they deserve, Dr. Gary Rodin was appointed as the Cancer Program's first Director of Cancer Experience at University Health Network (UHN). Dr. Rodin brings considerable experience in uniting diverse groups in Psychosocial Oncology, Palliative Care, Cancer Rehabilitation and Survivorship, and is implementing new ideas at The Princess Margaret, such as the Cancer Experience Program.

The Princess Margaret believes that attention to the support and well-being of all patients with cancer, their families, and healthcare workers is as important as the biological dimensions of cancer.

The Cancer Experience Program has identified the following priority areas to enhance the interconnected wellbeing of patients, caregivers, trainees and staff, and to ensure that opportunities for cancer care, education, and employment are inclusive, equitable, and accessible for all. These foundational elements are represented in the SuNDAE Framework: Supportive communication; Navigation; Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access; Ambience, Engagement.

## HEALTH EQUITY AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION

Our first goal to achieving equal and inclusive cancer care involves understanding the demographics of our patients and the needs of specialized groups who have barriers to accessing cancer treatment or struggle to navigate through their cancer experience.

We are collecting information about burden of disease and treatment, psychosocial risk factors, cultural diversity, age, gender and sexual orientation and other special needs, to identify gaps in cancer care and create more inclusive services.

### **Improving Health Equity by Removing Barriers**

The Carley's Angels Foundation's support has directly helped Fellow Dr. Gilla Shapiro launch a health equity project that is gathering comprehensive data about the diversity of patients at The Princess Margaret. One of its goals is to understand the barriers experienced by some patients to enrolling in clinical trials.

Cancer clinical trials represent an opportunity to better prevent, diagnose and treat cancer. They allow patients to access promising treatments and enhanced clinical care that would otherwise not be available to them. Understanding barriers to trials is critical to reducing disparities and developing tailored interventions to improve access.

Dr. Shapiro and team are using Princess Margaret data to study the characteristics of trial participants and measure disparities by age, sex, language, income and geography. To date, they have reviewed the published literature, developed the research protocol, and received Research Ethical Board approval for this study. Data analysis is currently underway and they look forward to reporting on results later this year.

## MEET FELLOW DR. GILLA SHAPIRO



Dr. Gilla Shapiro is a registered Clinical and Health Psychologist with a background in psychology, behavioural sciences and health policy.

Over the past year, her clinical focus has been on providing psychosocial care for patients with terminal illness and their caregivers. Using CALM therapy (Managing Cancer and Living Meaningfully) developed at The Princess Margaret, she provides psychological and emotional support to patients with advanced disease.

## **Supporting Cancer Patients through Research**

In her research, Dr. Shapiro has advanced our understanding on the best way to support patients with terminal disease who are interested in the Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) intervention. She has gathered information through a variety of approaches, such as a retrospective chart review, a study that follows patients over time, and a look at policy-makers' perspectives on the appropriate integration of services. Through these projects, Dr. Shapiro is expanding her knowledge of clinical research in psychosocial oncology, as well as her skills in methodological design and statistical analysis.

Dr. Shapiro is passionate about improving mental health in individuals who are experiencing chronic health conditions. She enjoys applying her knowledge of psychology and behavioural science to improve coping, resilience and support for patients and their caregivers. She is also passionate about health equity and improving access to cancer care for all.

## **The Princess Margaret Advantage**

Dr. Shapiro applied for a post-doctoral Fellowship at The Princess Margaret because of the opportunity to work with Dr. Gary Rodin, Dr. Madeline Li, and their world-renowned teams of clinical researchers. The mentorship Dr. Shapiro has received will enhance her skills in providing clinical care and conducting research to improve the experience of patients and their caregivers. She also appreciates that the interdisciplinary nature of the team enables her to combine her research interests in psychosocial oncology with social determinants of health, health equity and policy analysis.

Dr. Shapiro's career objective is to become a Clinician-Scientist in research that informs health policy and practice. She plans to use her interdisciplinary background in health psychology, clinical practice, health policy, prevention and palliative research to reduce disparities in health access and outcomes, and improve whole-person care for patients and their caregivers.

Dr. Shapiro was delighted to accept a staff position at The Princess Margaret after completing her Fellowship. Already an accomplished Clinician-Scientist with over 50 papers in peer-reviewed journals, multiple book chapters, and patient education booklets, she looks forward to continuing to support patients as an integral part of the team.

## **Supportive Communication for Better Patient Satisfaction**

Oncologists must be able to break unfortunate news to patients in a sensitive and empathic manner and manage the distressing emotions that such news can evoke in

patients, families and themselves. Supportive communication has been shown to increase patient and family satisfaction, reduce distress, promote faster recovery and improve quality of life.

However, while extensive training is provided to clinicians in almost all other aspects of medical care, many clinicians have received insufficient communication training. That is why The Princess Margaret is taking a systematic approach to communications skills training for staff with a new tool that will help Cancer Centre staff to better communicate with diverse groups of patients. This tool, funded by the Carley's Angels Foundation, will help clinicians support patients by building rapport and conveying adequate information in a timely fashion.

## **Project Empathy**

Excellence in cancer care requires that services offered to patients are not only medically rigorous, but also delivered in a supportive, empathic, and honest manner. Our team has identified an “empathy gap” between oncologists and their patients caused by gaps in training. Both patients and oncologists have also voiced the need for greater attention to communication skills in oncology.

In response, the Cancer Experience Program has launched Project Empathy: Supportive Communication in Cancer Care. This project will create an easily accessible, effective and engaging learning resource for oncologists that will highlight the importance and value of empathic communication at all stages of cancer treatment.

A series of short cinematic vignettes will be created that depict dialogues between patients and oncologists at vital moments in clinical care when communication may be critical and challenging. The scenario will illustrate the context to the conversation, how communication can break down, and the strategies that can facilitate supportive and empathic communication.



We envision these vignettes as high-quality productions, with scripts and professional actors, which will raise awareness about empathic communication and provide a rich learning opportunity for cancer care providers.

To that end, the Cancer Experience team has engaged the services of Gregory Sheppard, an accomplished television director. Among other projects, Gregory created over 20 of the famous “Heritage Minutes,” a collection of 60-second short films depicting a significant person or event in Canadian history.

The team envisions the “Project Empathy” vignettes being shown at hospital rounds at The Princess Margaret and ultimately shared with healthcare providers across Canada and around the world. This is only possible through your support.

## CANCER EXPERIENCE INITIATIVES

Equal access in cancer care remains a significant challenge. People who have greater health literacy, education, a primary care physician, and speak English as a first language, may have greater access to cancer care and improved health outcomes than marginalized and vulnerable populations without these advantages. To address those imbalances, the Cancer Experience program is launching a number of new initiatives:

### **Improving Sexual and Gender Diversity Education in Cancer Care**

The Princess Margaret, with leadership from Dr. Christian Shulz-Quach, is launching a Sexual and Gender Diversity Program. The purpose of the Program is to promote knowledge about the unique needs of sexual and gender minorities among healthcare providers, administrative staff and trainees. By 2023, the team will have piloted the first education module of a new curriculum that will be used across UHN.

### **Lived Experience of Black Women with Breast Cancer**

Led by Drs. Andrea Covelli and Jaime Escallon, this project will examine how barriers and inequities in access to cancer care shape the lived experience of black women with breast cancer. Previous research has shown that women with breast cancer from minority communities are diagnosed more frequently at advanced stages of disease and are less likely to receive optimal treatment than the demographic majority.

By partnering with the Olive Branch of Hope (a community-based breast cancer support service for black women), the team will be able to hear the experiences of black women with breast cancer. This rich narrative will provide an improved understanding of the challenges, barriers, inequities and/or variations in care faced by these women. The team's goal is to catalogue the impact of sociocultural factors and the healthcare environment on breast cancer care for black women.

### **Cultural and Linguistic Diversity and Digital Health Equity**

Toronto is the world's most culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) city in the world, one in which nearly 50% of households speak a language other than English at home. Unfortunately, this population remains understudied and at a heightened risk of medical errors, poor understanding of their illnesses and poorer medical outcomes. Additionally, the increased use of digital health tools at The Princess Margaret can create educational and linguistic barriers for these patients, which further prevents them from accessing the information they need.

The Comfort and Care for All team, led by Dr. Stephanie L'Heureux, aims to create a feasible solution with tangible impact on these patients' care by conducting a trial

implementation of iPads (iCALD) and e-interpreters for patients with CALD backgrounds.

## THANK YOU

The Princess Margaret relies on our community to enable exceptional care and impactful research, just as our community relies on us to provide comprehensive cancer care and exceptional patient experiences. Your foundation's crucial support for Dr. Rodin's Cancer Experience Program is investing in improved patient care and comfort that will be felt for generations to come.

We would like to express our gratitude to the Carley's Angels Foundation on behalf of the many patients and loved ones who will benefit from your generosity. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions about the Health Equity or Supportive Communication projects, or any aspect of The Princess Margaret's innovative research and care. We look forward to discussing this important work with you, and to continuing our valued partnership that will benefit cancer patients around the world.



**Lynda Debono**

Director, Major Gifts

The Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation

**C:** 416.946.2912

**E:** [lynda.debono@thepmcf.ca](mailto:lynda.debono@thepmcf.ca)

To learn more visit [thepmcf.ca](http://thepmcf.ca)

610 University Avenue, Toronto, ON M5G 2M9  
Charitable Organization No. 88900 7597 RR0001