

NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health
Vancouver Island Health Authority
BC Cancer Agency

NEW TECHNOLOGY MEANS CANCER CARE CLOSER TO HOME

VICTORIA – Cancer patients living north of Victoria can now consult face-to-face with their cancer specialists at the BC Cancer Agency’s Vancouver Island Centre in Victoria with the launch of the new remote access TeleCare program.

“Through investments in new technology, the B.C. government is improving access to high-quality medical services care to British Columbians where they live,” said Health Minister George Abbott. “Residents all across Vancouver Island will now be able to receive the same world-class consultation work from the BC Cancer Agency whether they are in Victoria or in six regional centres across the Island.”

TeleCare, a new Telehealth program that allows physicians and patients to remotely consult with oncologists in Victoria by video link, was developed by the BC Cancer Agency, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, in partnership with the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA).

Donations from the Lions and Lioness Clubs across Vancouver Island to the BC Cancer Foundation funded the six mobile videoconferencing units now operational in Nanaimo, Campbell River, Comox, Port Alberni, Port Hardy and Victoria hospitals. In addition, two other mobile units are located in Port McNeill and on Comorant Island, for a total of eight. The TeleCare project was funded by a grant from the Michael Smith Research Foundation.

“This whole operation is the greatest thing since peanut butter for patient care. It’s exactly the same as if you were there in Victoria,” said Terry Roberts, the first patient in Campbell River to use TeleCare for an appointment with his BC Cancer Agency Vancouver Island Centre oncologist. “You can see the doctor’s expression, his body language, so you know exactly what’s going on. This is a tremendous advance for patients.”

Reducing the need to travel to Victoria for an in-person consultation with an oncology specialist can relieve some of the physical, emotional and financial burden placed on patients who live up-Island. More than half of the patients receiving care and treatment at the Vancouver Island Cancer Centre live north of Duncan.

“This new program saves me a six-hour trip to Victoria,” added Roberts who was diagnosed with colon cancer in March 2006 and has only visited the BC Cancer Agency’s Vancouver Island Centre in person twice, thanks to TeleCare.

“This is really great news for cancer patients on Vancouver Island,” said Jac Kreut, VIHA board chair. “This technology enables patients to see their physician without having to travel long distances, and this increases the time they can spend in their communities and with their families.”

“With this program, we are able to provide access to cancer specialists closer to home for the many patients living outside of Victoria,” explained Dr. Brian Weinerman, medical oncologist at the BC Cancer Agency. “It simply isn’t possible to put specialists into every community, but with this technology we can improve access to cancer care and the quality of life for those living with cancer.”

Not only will TeleCare reduce patient travel to Victoria, it will also help provide important information and education to cancer patients who are unfamiliar with BC Cancer Agency services. Community physicians and other health care professionals will benefit from improved access to patient information and support from specialists.

“We are committed to improving the quality of life for Vancouver Islanders,” said Lyne Moreau, TeleCare co-ordinator for the Lions and Lioness Clubs from across Vancouver Island, who made the video units possible by raising over \$71,500 and donating it to the BC Cancer Foundation. “Some of these donations were made in memory of Keith Buchan, past district governor of the Gordon Head Lions, who recently died of cancer. We were very pleased the Lions International Foundation matched this for a total of \$140,000. Since then, a further \$25,000 has been donated from the community directly to the BC Cancer Foundation for TeleCare.”

The BC Cancer Agency, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, is committed to reducing the incidence of cancer, reducing the mortality from cancer, and improving the quality of life of those living with cancer. It provides a comprehensive cancer control program for the people of British Columbia by working with community partners to deliver a range of oncology services, including prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment, research, education, supportive care, rehabilitation and palliative care. The BC Cancer Foundation raises funds to support research and enhancements to patient care at the BC Cancer Agency.

Media contact:	Sarah Plank Media Manager Ministry of Health 250 480-6678 (cell) 250 952-1887 (media line)	Penny Noble Director, Marketing and Communications BC Cancer Foundation 604 707-5902 604 805-5637 (cell)
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Jinny Wu
Communications Specialist
BC Cancer Agency
604 877-6272

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