

“Patient navigators” newest members of NS health care team

Cancer patients in Nova Scotia are now getting information on their disease from the newest members of the provincial health care system, patient navigators. The navigators — at the moment all are nurses — provide newly diagnosed patients with a roadmap of the direction their care will take and coordinate the care where they live, said cancer commissioner Dr. Andrew Padmos, who is responsible for the overall planning, coordination and evaluation of cancer services and facilities in the province. “If we are truly going to rely on the community for care, it is up to us to get them the resources they need.”

Working closely with family physicians, specialists, family members and

community groups, navigators provide information directly to patients about their disease, its treatment and the treatment system.

These informed patients are also supposed to save doctors time. “Since patient navigators have been in place, my patients are better prepared for their appointments,” says Dr. Leonard Reyno, a medical oncologist with the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax. “They have a better understanding of their disease and how it is affecting them. They have thought through the questions they need answered in order to make the right decisions. Because of the patient navigator, I’m able to focus on patient care and treatment issues.”

The program was officially launched by the province and Cancer Care Nova Scotia after research found that patients didn’t know where to find information and how to wend their way through the province’s complex and often convoluted cancer care system. “Patients were bereft [of help] from the time of diagnosis until treatment,” says Padmos. “They were often vexed by appointment scheduling issues and tests. They felt the need for increased information.”

Patient navigators are now in place in 3 regions in Nova Scotia, and the program will be evaluated before being offered across the province. — *Donalee Moulton, Halifax*

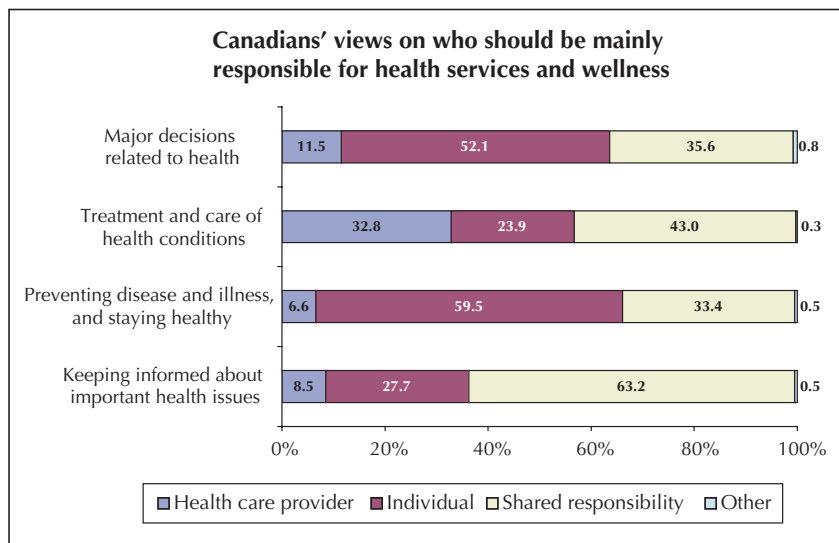
PULSE

“Shared responsibility” becoming the new medical buzz phrase

A recent HealthInsiders survey found almost two-thirds (63%) of Canadians think that they and their health care provider share responsibility for keeping informed about important health issues. The survey of Canadians’ views on the patient-provider relationship also found that women are more likely than men to say that the responsibility should be shared (67.5% v. 50.1%). People with less than secondary education were less likely than those with postsecondary education (38% v. 66.5%) to say that the responsibility should be shared.

Sixty percent of Canadians feel that they are primarily responsible for preventing disease and illness and staying healthy; only 8.5% feel this is mostly the responsibility of the provider. One-third (32.8%) of respondents believe their health care provider is mainly responsible for the treatment and care of health problems, 23.9% think that they are largely responsible and 43% say responsibility is shared.

More than half (52.1%) of Canadians believe they are mainly responsible for making major decisions related to their health, with another 35.6%



deeming the responsibility to be shared with their provider. Only 11.5% state that the provider is mainly responsible for health decisions. The great majority of those surveyed (94.5%) agree or strongly agree that they prefer doctors to give them choices or options regarding their treatment and then let them decide

what to do. Less than half of Canadians (40%) agree or strongly agree that they accept without question physicians’ decisions about their treatment. For information about the survey, contact Dale McMurphy at 416 815-5102— *Shelley Martin*, Senior Analyst, Research, Policy and Planning Directorate, CMA