

# Headlines

Winter 12 *A newsletter for brain tumour patients and their families*

## MEDICAL UPDATE

### Braincare BC Progress

**B**RAINCARE BC IS A PROGRAM initiated by the neuro-oncology tumour group at the BC Cancer Agency in Vancouver under the leadership of Dr. Brian Toyota, a neurosurgeon who specializes in brain tumour care. The goal of the program is to improve the lives of those afflicted with brain tumours and to enhance research capability in order to find better treatments for the disease.

Members of the team include health care professionals in neurosurgery, radiation oncology, neuro-oncology, neuropathology, nursing and counselling.

Team members undertook a review of the process of patient care from diagnosis to care in the community after treatment is completed. They sought to develop seamless patient-centred care even before the first visit at the cancer agency, and throughout the course of the disease process. Patients and their family caregivers provided input to the initial development of the program and continue to guide developments in care through a formal Patient & Family Advisory Committee (PFAC) which meets several times a year. Projects undertaken

by this committee include the revision of patient information, suggestions for improved psychological support and the development of a peer navigator program, in which patients who have completed treatment serve as guides to new patients.

Braincare BC currently provides funding for dedicated, expert care in Vancouver, Abbotsford and Victoria centres, with a goal of expanding services in every cancer centre in British Columbia.

A brain tumour tissue bank has been established and is growing, providing a rich source of material for the study of the basic science of brain tumours. As our knowledge of the processes of cell mutation and malignancy grows, avenues of research leading to better treatments – and a cure for brain tumours – will follow. In addition, by discovering the unique characteristics and molecular signature of a specific tumour, the way is paved for an individualized approach to treatment.

A translational research unit will allow discoveries made in the laboratory to be applied to actual patients. In addition, a clinical trials unit, supported by an initial investment of \$1.5 million, is allowing more experimental treatments to be tested through clinical trials. A research counselor has also been hired to conduct studies related to the psychological well-being and support of brain tumour patients and their families.



Some of the Braincare BC team members (left to right): Stephen Yip, Roy Ma, Ira Yakubovitz, Maureen Parkinson, Brian Thiessen, Matthew Follwell, Douglas Ozier, Rosemary Cashman, Michael McKenzie, Meg Knowling, Alan Nichol and Colleen Pelletier.

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## Good Nutrition

**A** THOUGH NO PARTICULAR DIET has been found to be helpful in treating brain cancer or preventing its recurrence, good nutrition is important for everyone. Your nutritional needs are better met through a healthy diet than through the use of dietary supplements such as vitamin and mineral capsules, tablets or infusions. Some supplements,

such as high dose antioxidants (including vitamins A, C and E), may actually make your cancer treatments less effective. Talk to your health care team for guidance if you are thinking of modifying your diet or using supplements.

Treatment may affect your appetite which can in turn cause changes in your diet. The Canada Food Guide

[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php) emphasizes the importance of vegetables, fruits and whole grains and offers clear guidance about the quantities and types of foods that make up a healthy diet.

In British Columbia you can also access advice about nutrition online at [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca) or by calling 811.

## Cauliflower, Carrot, and Yam Soup

By Janet Dukowski,  
nutritionist and brain tumour survivor

**T**HIS TASTY, THICK SOUP is the perfect winter meal. The tofu is optional in this recipe, but I suggest you give it a try – once the soup is blended you won't notice that it's there and it gives your soup an added protein kick. The soup freezes well and can be pulled out of the freezer for a quick lunch or dinner.

Serving size: approximately 6

Prep time: 25 mins

Cook time: 30 mins

Utensils required: large pot, sharp knife, cutting board, blender

### Ingredients

- 3 tbsp canola oil
- 1 – 2 large leeks, thinly sliced
- 4 cloves of garlic, sliced
- 3 cups cauliflower, chopped into small florets
- 1 medium yam, cut into 1" cubes
- 3 large carrots, chopped
- 1 package soft tofu (optional)
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 900 mL carton of "low sodium" chicken stock, plus extra if necessary (or water)
- Black pepper to taste



### Directions

- Heat oil in large soup pot on med-high heat.
- Add leeks and garlic and sauté for until soft, approximately 5 minutes.
- Add cauliflower, yam, carrots, tofu (if using), cumin, and turmeric to pot. Mix together.
- Add chicken stock, turn heat to high until soup comes to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer soup for 20 minutes or until vegetables soften.
- Add black pepper to taste.
- Puree soup until you reach your desired texture.
- If soup is too thick, add extra stock or water to reach desired consistency.

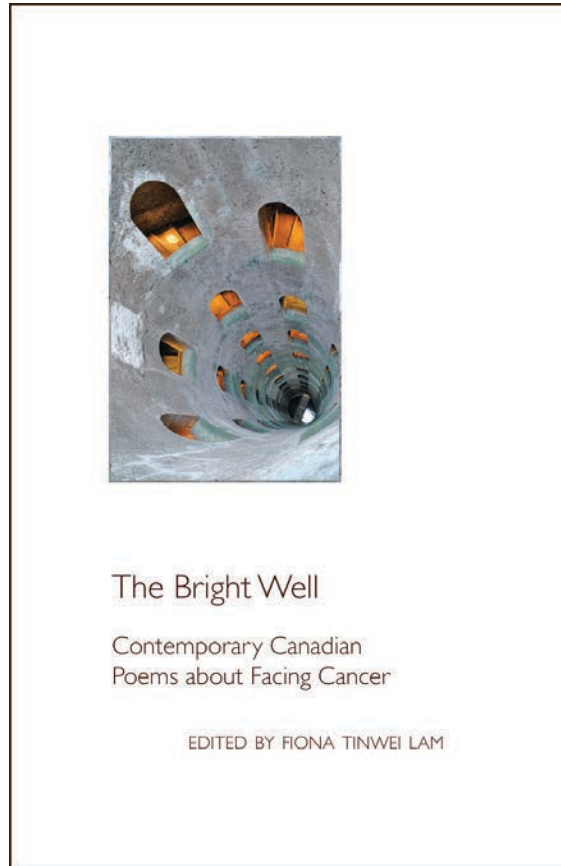
# The Bright Well: Contemporary Canadian Poems about Facing Cancer

**T**HIS SLIM ANTHOLOGY is divided into four sections: diagnosis; going under: surgery; treatment; the other side. These twenty accomplished Canadian poets have all experienced cancer, either as patients themselves or through caring for a loved one. Although no poem specifically addresses the experience of brain cancer, they all distill images and feelings that will be recognizable to anyone facing a life-threatening illness.

The title of the collection refers to the process of introspection and search for strength in hardship that those facing a cancer diagnosis may undergo.

Writing about the book, Canadian writer and physician Gabor Maté says: "More than a disease, cancer is a life event. The raw authenticity, visceral force and sheer beauty of the writing in this volume invite and compel us all to share that experience. The poets collected here lay bare their bodies and their souls, and such is their alchemy that their fear becomes our fear – just as their suffering, courage and triumph express our own."

Proceeds from the sale of the book will fund counselling and support for cancer patients and their families.



The Cover: The Pozzo di San Patrizio, St. Patrick's well.

Copies of the book are available to borrow at the BC Cancer Agency Rix Family Library in Vancouver [www.bccancer.bc.ca/PPI/Library/Contacts.htm#Vancouver](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/PPI/Library/Contacts.htm#Vancouver), or through the publisher [orders@leafpress.ca](mailto:orders@leafpress.ca).

*The Bright Well: Contemporary Canadian Poems about Facing Cancer*  
Edited by Fiona Tinwei Lam  
Leaf Press, Lantzville, B.C.

From *The Bright Well*

## RADIOTHERAPY

By Richard Sommer

Today it begins:  
I'm in to the city with my baggage,  
all kinds.

Just now, the white cat Luna  
crossed a lawn full of the lace  
of sun & intricate branch shadows

each laying its finger & bar of smudge  
softly across her back, smoothing it,  
leaving no trace as she moved on.

Watching her saunter across  
new grass & old leaves,  
I watch a billion years

of still evolving grace.  
My eyes take her in.  
I won't see her again

for five days anyway.  
Time for me to hunger after grace,  
all kinds.

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**Braincare BC Progress**  
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A minimally invasive surgical suite with sophisticated technology, including intra-operative MRI and neuro-navigation is planned. This will minimize the risks of surgery to brain function and maximize the benefit of surgical interventions.

The scope of the Braincare BC program is far-reaching and comprehensive. Several key objectives have already been accomplished. If you'd like more information about Braincare BC or about how you can help with this ambitious program, please contact our secretary, Colleen Pelletier, at [cpelleti@bccancer.bc.ca](mailto:cpelleti@bccancer.bc.ca) or 604 877 6000 x 2418.

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For more information on how you can support enhanced patient care, patient information and brain tumour research, please contact Sharon Kennedy at the BC Cancer Foundation, 604 877 6160 or 1 888 906 2873 or [skennedy@bccancer.bc.ca](mailto:skennedy@bccancer.bc.ca)

**Q** I am planning a holiday with my family when I finish my chemotherapy and radiation. My oncologist has approved this plan, but tells me that my insurance may not cover any health emergencies requiring medical help outside of Canada. What can you tell me about this? It is OK for me to go to Hawaii?

**A** Obtaining travel insurance can be a challenging and frustrating process for people with “pre-existing medical conditions.” While each person’s situation is unique, here are some points to consider before leaving the country on holiday.

Your provincial health insurance may not pay for all the health care costs you incur outside your home province, and the difference can be substantial. For example, B.C. pays \$75 (Canadian) a day for emergency in-patient hospital care, while the average cost in the U.S. often exceeds \$1000 (U.S.) a day, and can be as high as \$10,000 (U.S.) a day in intensive care. For this reason, you are strongly advised to check coverage provided by any additional insurance you may carry. You may wish to purchase additional health insurance from a private insurer before you leave the province, whether you are going to another part of Canada or outside the country – even if you plan to be away for only a day. See [www.health.gov.bc.ca/mssp/infoben/leavingbc.html](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/mssp/infoben/leavingbc.html) for more information.

In order to purchase travel or other insurance coverage, you are often required to fill out a health questionnaire. If you are unsure how to answer the questions, ask your physician for assistance.

Many regular travel or other insurance policies have an insurance “rider” which

allows for coverage despite the existence of a “pre-existing medical condition.” However, there are always exclusion criteria that are attached to these insurance “riders.” Therefore, **you need to read the fine print on a policy very carefully because insurance companies**

**may never screen your application until you try to make a claim on it.** If your medical history violates the policy’s “exclusion criteria for a pre-existing condition,” the insurance company could void your policy, claiming that you were never really eligible for the coverage. The responsibility would then fall on you to fight for your claim.

Most exclusion criteria for pre-existing conditions center on the requirement

that the condition has been “stable” for some period before the purchase date (often ranging from between 90 days and one year). Therefore, it becomes crucial to carefully understand how the policy defines “stable” to see if you fulfill the definition. Examples of the kind of criteria that might be used to define stable are:

- not having had any active treatment during the specified period
- not having made any changes in medication or diagnosis
- not awaiting any test results
- not having been hospitalized

Most plans do not cover those diagnosed with cancer that has spread outside the original site or that is no longer responsive to cancer treatment. Age is also an important factor for insurance. For example, a company might have different requirements and policies for those under 55, between 55 and 75, and over 75.

Beware of things that “look too good to be true.” They usually are!

Insurance companies may provide a quote over the phone or online for the cost

## Question + answer



## Resources

For challenging situations, you may want to work with an insurance broker. This is a professional who does not work for any particular insurance company but will instead look for the best policy to meet your needs. To find a broker who has special expertise in dealing with pre-existing conditions, call the **Insurance Brokers Association of BC for a referral (604.606.8000).**

**The Canadian OmbudService for Life and Health Insurance (1.888.295.8112)** provides expert information on insurance and, if necessary, may help resolve disputes with insurance companies regarding claims. Here is what they say about themselves:

“The OmbudService for Life & Health Insurance (OLHI) is a national independent complaint resolution and information service for consumers of Canadian life and health insurance products and services, including life, disability, employee health benefits, travel, and insurance investment products...OLHI’s information and complaints handling staff have extensive knowledge of life and health insurance products, services, and practices and are available to promptly respond to your concern, question or complaint in both official languages, free of charge, during normal business hours and through our website.” See [www.olhi.ca](http://www.olhi.ca)

of coverage, based on what a client has told them about his/her condition. It is in your interest to be very candid and honest about your illness and treatment.

*By Douglas Ozier, PhD  
(Counselling Psychology)*

Editions of *Headlines* are also available as a pdf download at:

[www.bccancer.bc.ca/PPI/copingwithcancer/specificresources/Neurooncology.htm](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/PPI/copingwithcancer/specificresources/Neurooncology.htm)

If you would like to submit an article, ask a question, or serve on our patient and family advisory board, please contact Rosemary Cashman at [rcashman@bccancer.bc.ca](mailto:rcashman@bccancer.bc.ca) or 604 877 6072 (phone) 604 877 6215 (fax).

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