

May 3, 2010

## Research program lulls cancer survivors to sleep

CALGARY – They won the battle with one disease. Now some cancer survivors are overcoming years of chronic insomnia caused by their oncology treatment through participation in an Alberta Health Services / University of Calgary research program.

I-CAN Sleep is the first Canadian study to assess sleep-improving techniques specifically intended for cancer patients and survivors.

As many as one-third of all cancer patients develop sleep problems during treatment that persist for years after treatment is completed, says study lead Sheila Garland, an AHS sleep specialist and doctoral student in clinical psychology at the University of Calgary.

“Insomnia doesn’t go away on its own once it becomes chronic. It needs some sort of intervention,” she says.

“Sedatives aren’t the long-term solution because sleep becomes dependent on the medication. Cancer patients don’t want to be on sedatives for the rest of their lives. This study is finding effective, natural methods to help patients and survivors improve the quality of their sleep.”

She says cancer patients develop insomnia for many reasons, including stress caused by their illness and changes to regular sleep patterns caused by chemotherapy and other cancer treatments. Insufficient sleep can negatively impact a person’s mood and pain threshold, compounding the difficulty of cancer treatment.

About 94,000 Albertans are living with cancer, and 16,000 are newly diagnosed every year.

A Calgary ad campaign was launched this month to attract more candidates for the three-year study, expected to wrap up in Fall 2011. More than 80 cancer survivors, ages 30 to 88, have already taken part, with another 80 needed.

Candidates must be 18 or older and preferably in remission from cancer. If accepted, they will be entered into one of two research streams, which assess different behavioral techniques to battle insomnia, such as relaxation, stress reduction and sleep hygiene. To maintain the integrity of the study, details about each stream are revealed to candidates only after they have been accepted into the program.

Participants record their nightly rest in a sleep diary for two months and attend weekly, professionally led therapy sessions. They also must wear a sleep monitor wristwatch for one week at the start and end of the program.

Kent Parlee, 46, completed the program last month and is sleeping at least 6.5 hours nightly for the first time since he was diagnosed with leukemia in 2006.

By Summer 2007, he was getting only two to three hours of fitful sleep per night.

“I had an overwhelming feeling of exhaustion,” he recalls. “It got very frustrating and a little bit scary. I had trouble getting out of bed in the morning, I was fatigued at work and I had no energy for household chores.

“Now, despite ongoing cancer treatment, my energy is far more than what it has been over the past three years. I’m rested and my mind is sharper. It’s night and day, no pun intended.”

The research team also includes Dr. Linda Carlson, an AHS psychologist and associate professor in psychosocial oncology in the Department of Oncology, Faculty of Medicine at the U of C, and Dr. Tavis Campbell, associate professor of clinical psychology at the U of C.

People interested in the I-CAN Sleep program can call **1-877-SLEEP40** for more information.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.5 million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

- 30 -

For media inquiries, please contact:  
David Veitch  
Alberta Health Services  
Ph. 403-943-1301



The University of Calgary is ranked top 10 in Canada for research income, fundraising, endowment, research competitions and national awards. For more information, visit: [www.ucalgary.ca](http://www.ucalgary.ca)