

Cancer society to charge fee for transportation service

By Ian Holroyd

SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

A ride to the hospital to undergo cancer treatment will no longer be free of charge at the Canadian Cancer Society.

The national cancer support service recently announced it will begin charging a \$100 registration fee to new patients in Ontario for its transportation service after October 1.

According to the society, the decision was made based on the changing landscape of cancer. With the population of Ontario growing and aging, the number of new cancer cases is increasing, as is the number of patients needing a ride to their treatments.

The Canadian Cancer Society has provided transportation to patients in Ontario since the 1950s and, according to Tanya Nixon, senior manager of transportation with the society, this one-time reg-

istration fee will help maintain the program.

"We know that we want to be able to keep this program going," Nixon said. "It's hugely important to people in Ontario. It's a program that's used by a lot of people and in many cases it's their only way of getting to treatment, so we wanted to ensure that we could continue with it."

Significant rise in demand

Last year in the province, there was a 20 per cent increase in the number of people registering for the transportation program.

"We really needed to look at a way that, moving forward, this program could continue," said Nixon, who explained that incorporating the registration fee was a difficult decision to make. "The last thing we want to do is have to scale back on services."

Though drivers volunteer their time and their vehicles, they're reim-

bursed 30 cents for every kilometre they drive.

Last year, the society's Halton Unit had 553 new clients register and supported 2,451 people. The agency's 135 drivers drove 306,495 km. Across Ontario, 15,500 patients received rides to treatment and travelled more than 12 million km. The new registration fee is only being instituted in Ontario because, though the Canadian Cancer Society is a national program, each province runs its transportation service separately.

Nixon said each patient on average travels to the hospital between 10 and 17 times, which can become a financial burden to some after they pay for gas and hospital parking. She noted financial need isn't the only reason why people avail themselves of the transportation program at the Canadian Cancer Society.

"We know that often it's because

(patients) are just not feeling well enough to drive or they're feeling unsafe driving their vehicle," she said.

"It's a program known by people certainly in the hospitals and the cancer centres as being a very supportive environment for somebody when they're traveling. The drivers are some of the most compassionate people I know and they make the experience a pleasant one for someone when they're in a difficult time."

Nixon also emphasized that no one would ever be turned away if they couldn't afford the \$100 registration fee.

"Our underlying message here is that nobody will be left behind," she said. "We have a compassionate program in place so if somebody says, 'I can't afford it, \$100 would be cumbersome,' we would not say, 'You can't take the service.' We would take them."

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