

Study Update

Good news! Recruitment to *The Tomorrow Project* resumed in June 2006 with the goal of increasing the number of participants from 18,500 to 30,000. As of June 2007, a total of 28,518 participants had enrolled in the project and had returned their first questionnaire.

If you have questionnaires at home, please send them along as we will be delighted to receive them. It is never too late! A study like *The Tomorrow Project* relies on a high response rate and every survey counts. Please call us if you have questions or need a replacement questionnaire.

Where Participants are from

The Tomorrow Project participants come from all walks of life in over 540 cities, towns, and villages, and from all rural areas throughout Alberta. The chart below shows the number of people enrolled as of June 2007 from each Health Region in the Province.

| Health Region | Total |
|-----------------------|--------|
| Chinook | 2,116 |
| Palliser | 1,385 |
| Calgary Health Region | 7,725 |
| David Thompson | 3,341 |
| East Central | 1,655 |
| Capital | 7,133 |
| Aspen | 2,463 |
| Peace | 1,740 |
| Northern Lights | 960 |
| TOTAL | 28,518 |

Welcome New Participants

If this is your first newsletter, welcome to *The Tomorrow Project*. You are joining other Albertans who have enrolled in the study since 2000 and are part of the largest recruitment drive in the history of the Project. The 10,000 new participants enrolled in the last year come from every region of the province. If you have not received them already, you can expect to receive questionnaires about diet and physical activity within the next couple of months.

Watch for your copy of *Tomorrow's News* every six months – inside you will find information from the world of cancer research as well as updates about the progress of the study. To read back issues of the newsletter, go to the newsletter archive on www.thetomorrowproject.org.

What's Next?

We're preparing a new survey for distribution to all participants in mid 2008. Survey 2008 will ask you to update some of your health information. It will also ask for some new information regarding places where you have lived and worked over your lifetime. This kind of information can be used to help us understand how some aspects of day to day environment might impact on future cancer risk.

Please Help Us Keep Our Files Up To Date

Because *The Tomorrow Project* is a long-term study, staying in touch with participants is an important part of our work because it reduces the number of participants who are "lost-to-follow-up". Please take a moment to contact us with any changes or additions to your contact information. Remember, we can send you information wherever you live, even outside Alberta or Canada.

Need To Contact Us?

E-mail: tomorrow@cancerboard.ab.ca
Toll-free telephone: 1-877-919-9292
Outside Canada: (403) 521-3122 (call collect)
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Who's Who in The Tomorrow Project

A common thread that weaves through Marg Girgulis' life is her passion for sewing. Marg grew up on a farm near Saskatoon, Saskatchewan where her mother introduced her to a treadle sewing machine at the tender age of five. Marg's mother sewed clothes for the family and Marg soon followed in her footsteps.

"Sewing has been with me my whole life," says 68-year-old Marg. She went through public school and high school taking home economics and sewing classes whenever she could. Marg even wrote a book on sewing called *So you want to sew!* The resource was used in adult education classes in the 1960s in Saskatchewan. Marg has also travelled to India to teach women to sew through an outreach mission with her church. She is so passionate about sewing that when Marg married her late husband, Harry at the age of 19, she made all the bridesmaids' dresses and even sewed her own wedding gown!

In 1961, Harry and Marg relocated to Regina where they stayed for 29 years. Harry was an English high school teacher and Marg owned a fabric and sewing store. She also worked as an interior decorator for Eaton's. The couple retired to Peachland, BC but soon after decided to return to the prairies and settled in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Harry was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1995 and passed away peacefully in Marg's arms on the morning after their 40th wedding anniversary. Marg also lost her father to prostate cancer and her best friend successfully underwent treatment for breast cancer a year ago.

"So I'm very interested in getting something to stop this horrendous disease," says Marg. "You can hardly turn around and not hear about someone with cancer. It's just so bad."



Study participant Marg Girgulis runs her sewing business from home in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

When Marg received correspondence in the mail inviting her to join *The Tomorrow Project* she did not hesitate and has been a participant for over a year.

Marg's niece, Brenda describes her aunt as a very passionate and creative woman with an infectious laugh. She says normally Marg is a very happy person in spite of how cancer has affected her life. "When Uncle Harry died, she was a solid person," says Brenda. "He died in her arms. I was there when he died. She's a rock."

Sewing continues to be a constant presence in Marg's life. Brenda and Marg run a sewing business together out of Marg's house called Creations by MEG. "I guess I'm a workaholic," says Marg. "I can't stand sitting around. It drives me nuts. I have to be doing something and shopping is not my bag. I'd rather be home sewing a pair of drapes."

Alberta's NEW Colorectal Cancer Screening Program

In March 2007, the Alberta Colorectal Cancer Screening Program was launched by the Alberta Cancer Board and Alberta Health and Wellness, in collaboration with other health professional groups. In this issue of *Tomorrow's News*, we provide some information about colorectal cancer, as well as an introduction to the new screening program in our province.

How does colorectal cancer impact Albertans?

Every year, approximately 1,400 Albertans receive a diagnosis of colorectal cancer, and about 580 people die of the disease. Colorectal cancer is Alberta's second most deadly cancer.

So, what does 'colorectal' mean?

'Colorectal' is a term used to describe the colon and the rectum, which together are also known as the large bowel. When food is eaten, it passes from the mouth down the gullet into the stomach. After some digestion in the stomach, the food moves into the small intestine, where most of the nutrients are absorbed. The remaining waste passes into the colon, where water is removed from it. Following this final digestive process, the waste is passed from the colon into the rectum, before leaving the body as bowel movements. Doctors often refer to bowel movements as stool.

What is colorectal cancer?

The inner wall of the colon and rectum are lined with cells. Under normal conditions, the body grows only as many cells as are needed to ensure that the lining of the colon and rectum is smooth. Sometimes, the process regulating the growth of the cells breaks down, and the cells grow too fast. In this situation, the overgrowth of cells can form a clump known as a polyp. Polyps are usually benign (not cancer), but if they are not found, some types can change into colorectal cancer over the years. If polyps do turn into cancer, people often do not have noticeable symptoms until the cancer is at a later stage.

How will screening help?

Screening is a process that can identify people in the population who may appear healthy, but who are at higher risk than others of having colorectal polyps or cancer.

The two main aims of colorectal screening are:

- (i) To find polyps before they have a chance to turn into cancer, so that fewer people will go on to develop colorectal cancer;
- (ii) To find colorectal cancer at an early stage, so that chances of successful treatment are increased.

Like all screening tests, colorectal cancer screening is not 100 per cent reliable, but it has been shown to decrease numbers of people diagnosed with colorectal cancer, and to decrease numbers of people dying from the disease.



Above is an example of a typical FOB test kit used for colorectal cancer screening.

How will screening be done?

In Alberta, it is recommended that every average risk adult aged 50 to 74 years have a yearly test called the fecal occult blood test (FOB test). In this case, occult means hidden or not visible. The FOB test involves putting small samples of stool on a card, which then gets sent off for analysis in a laboratory. If blood is found in the stool sample, an additional test is recommended to find out whether the bleeding has been caused by polyps or cancer, or something else. In Alberta, the follow-up test is usually colonoscopy.

Colorectal cancer screening in *The Tomorrow Project*

Participants in *The Tomorrow Project* answered questions about colorectal screening on the Health and Lifestyle Questionnaire. The same questions were asked on Survey 2004, sent out to everyone who had enrolled in the study between 2001 and 2003.

The responses to those questions suggest that many *Tomorrow Project* participants aged 50 and older have not had regular colorectal cancer screening. For example, on the Health and Lifestyle Questionnaire, about half of the people aged 50 or more told us that they had never had any colorectal screening, and only about one quarter of people in the same age group told us that they were up to date with screening. The results from Survey 2004 indicated a similarly low level of colorectal screening among participants over 50¹, particularly among those people who had never had any previous colorectal screening.



How will the Alberta Colorectal Cancer Screening Program address these issues?

The program will make sure that as many people as possible know about and participate in colorectal cancer screening, and will also remind doctors that people over the age of 50 need to be screened regularly. It will also put systems in place to ensure that all colorectal screening test results will be reviewed in a reasonable amount of time, so that everyone who participates in the program will be followed up appropriately. Ultimately, the new program will help save lives and reduce suffering from colorectal cancer.

Where can I find out more information?

More information on the Alberta Colorectal Cancer Screening Program can be found on the web at www.cancerboard.ab.ca/Treatment/CancerInformation/Colorectal/ or phone 1-866-727-3926 or e-mail cancerscreening@cancerboard.ab.ca.

For more information about colorectal cancer:

www.cmaj.ca/cgi/content/full/168/2/178?eaf
www.medicinenet.com/colon_cancer/article.htm
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/ncccs-cndcc/

¹ McGregor SE, Lewin AM and Bryant H. Uptake of colorectal cancer screening among a cohort of adults aged 50-69 in Alberta, Canada. Presented at the 2007 meeting of the Canadian Society for Epidemiology and Biostatistics.