

Tomorrow's News

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The *Tomorrow Project* – Albertans Studying the Connection Between Lifestyle and Cancer

Who's Who At The *Tomorrow Project*

The day to day activities at the *Tomorrow Project* offices consist of interviewing and measuring participants in the Study Centre and processing the questionnaires. Questionnaires that are returned by mail arrive from Canada Post in bins and we typically receive anywhere from 40 to 250 questionnaires each day. Questionnaire processing involves logging each piece of incoming mail to keep track of what we have received from each participant, coding each questionnaire for missing or contradictory information, following up with participants on the telephone, and scanning the forms and entering the data using a computerized system. Once all of the questionnaire and study centre data is entered, there are several steps involved in checking the accuracy and quality of the data.

At our Calgary offices, the *Tomorrow Project* has 25 staff. All of the day to day activities described above are performed by a team of thirteen Project Assistants and three Research Assistants and are overseen by two Senior Research Assistants, Sanaz Vaseghi and Wendy Powell.



Sanaz Vaseghi

Sanaz joined the *Tomorrow Project* team in February 2008. Sanaz's responsibilities with the team include overseeing the processing of the thousands of questionnaires we receive every year. She trains staff, develops timelines for coding and entering the questionnaires and monitors these targets. Sanaz

deals with any difficult or unusual situations that come up on the questionnaires and systematically checks the accuracy of all the steps of processing the questionnaires.

Originally from Iran, Sanaz moved to Canada in 2007. Sanaz obtained a Medical Doctorate, a Master of Public Health degree and completed a Community Medicine Residency program in Tehran, Iran. Sanaz joined the *Tomorrow Project* with six years of experience working on population research projects and national health programs with the Iran Ministry of Health and Medical Education. She worked on a research study of growth and nutrition in young children, and was also involved in a study that examined risks of death and ill health due to diseases and injuries.



Wendy Powell

Wendy joined the *Tomorrow Project* team in June 2008. Wendy's responsibilities with the team are to oversee study centre visits, including interviewing and the collection of physical measurements from participants. She trains staff, develops policies and procedures and develops and maintains quality assurance checks for both the

measurement equipment and the staff trained to take the physical measurements.

Originally from Northern Ontario, Wendy moved to Alberta in 1993. Fascinated with the field of health research, Wendy obtained an Honours Bachelor of Science in Physiology and a Master of Science in Reproductive Endocrinology at the University of Western Ontario. She then worked for nine years as the Head Technician in medical research laboratories at the University Hospital in London, Ontario and the Max Bell Research Institute in Toronto. In the lab she was involved in studies that investigated reproductive problems in women. Outside of her work with the *Tomorrow Project*, Wendy loves watercolour painting, bird watching, hiking and camping.

RESIDENTIAL HISTORY AND EXPOSURE TO CARCINOGENS

Last year, we mailed almost 30,000 surveys to everyone who joined the *Tomorrow Project* between 2000 and 2007. As of 30th June 2009, just over 70% of those surveys had been completed and returned to us for processing. We are extremely grateful to everyone who returned that very long survey!

Why did we ask about residential history?

On Survey 2008, we asked participants a lot of questions about where they live. We also invited everyone to tell us about all the places where they had lived over their lifetime. Some of you may have been wondering why we asked for all that detail. The main reason is that there is some limited evidence to suggest that the location of a residence at certain points in a person's life might be associated with future cancer risk. The existing evidence is not strong enough to allow public health officials to give advice on the kinds of places where people should, or should not live. However, studies like the *Tomorrow Project* are well placed to contribute new knowledge about how location of residence might be associated with long term health.



How will we use the residential history information?

Mapping technologies, based on Geographic Information Systems (GIS), are being used more and more in health research. GIS was developed in Canada in the 1960s by Roger Tomlinson to use in the Canada Land Inventory, specifically for rural land use planning. Originally known as the Canada Geographic Information System, GIS has now evolved into a very sophisticated tool. It can be used in applications as diverse as marketing, managing networks of pipelines, analyzing crop yields, mapping crime, and developing transportation networks.



Health researchers are now starting to use GIS in different ways. For example, some have mapped residential locations to figure out distances from health care facilities. Others have investigated how neighbourhood characteristics and distances from fast food outlets might be associated with overweight or obesity (Li et al, 2009).

However, our interest in finding out about residential locations in Survey 2008 came about because of a new collaboration that we are developing with researchers from CAREX Canada. This large project, also supported by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, aims to figure out how, where and at what levels Canadians might be exposed to cancer causing factors in

their environment. Known as carcinogens, these factors include industrial chemicals, heavy metals like lead and arsenic, pesticides, asbestos, radiation and air pollution.

Researchers from CAREX Canada aim to use many different sources of information to make maps of the amounts of carcinogens in air, water and soil across Canada. At the *Tomorrow Project*, we will use GIS to develop maps of residential locations of our participants at various points in time. Following that step, we will

partner with the CAREX Canada researchers to intersect the maps. Using the combined maps we will be able to explore when, for how long, and at what level participants may have been exposed to potential carcinogens in the air, water and soil in the areas where they lived.

We anticipate that this collaboration between the *Tomorrow Project* and CAREX Canada will help shed new light on the roles played by environmental carcinogens in affecting cancer risk in the future.

For more information:

CAREX Canada:

<http://www.carexcanada.ca/research/>

International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC):

<http://www.iarc.fr/en/about/index.php>

Li F, Harmer P, Cardinal BJ, Bosworth M, Johnson-Shelton D
Obesity and the built environment: does the density of neighborhood fast-food outlets matter? *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 2009; 23(3):203-9.

Evaluating New Educational Resources on Colorectal Cancer Screening



Dr. Elizabeth McGregor (Co-Investigator, *Tomorrow Project*) is actively involved in learning more about people’s awareness and attitudes about colorectal cancer screening. As part of a research project at the Alberta Health Services – Cancer Corridor, she has developed three educational resources that will be used in doctors’ offices to help people learn about colon cancer and ways to detect it. She is looking for potential volunteers to use one of the resources and provide feedback about them and how to improve them. The results will help design a future study about educational resources and whether they can influence people’s decision to be screened for colon cancer.

To be eligible, you must be aged 50 to 70 years old, live in the Calgary region and have never had colon cancer. If you volunteer to take part in this optional research project, you will be asked to attend an information session at the Forzani & MacPhail Colon Cancer Screening Centre, located at the Foothills Medical Complex, at a time convenient for you. At that session, you will be given a choice from three educational resources to use and evaluate: a brochure, website, or telephone education line. You will also be invited to complete a series of six questionnaires, the first of which will be completed at the information session. The remaining questionnaires will be given to you over the phone or through the mail.

If you are interested in participating in this study, or would like more detailed information, please contact the **Study Coordinator, Janine English, at (403) 521-3003.**

We Are Now Accepting Volunteers!

Over the years, many of you have asked us if your friends, family, co-workers or acquaintances could also join the *Tomorrow Project*. Up until now, we have always recruited participants randomly. However, since joining the larger *Canadian Partnership for Tomorrow Project*, we have decided to begin accepting volunteers who are willing to attend a study centre, donate samples of blood and urine, and complete questionnaires about health and lifestyle.



People can phone us any time (1-877-919-9292) for more information about participating in the *Tomorrow Project*. Calling for information does not commit anyone to taking part. Please consider passing along our toll free phone number to anyone you know who you think may be interested in participating!

Tomorrow Project Staff Participate in Fund Raising

Tomorrow Project staff have been busy raising money for the Alberta Cancer Foundation this spring. Two Project Assistants, Kate del Rosario and Terry Saunders, ran 10km in the Underwear Affair in Calgary on June 6, and Principal Investigator Paula Robson walked in the Edmonton Underwear Affair on June 20. Each had to raise a minimum of \$300 in order to participate. The Underwear Affair raises money to help fight 'cancers below the waist', including prostate, colorectal, ovarian, testicular, bladder, cervical and uterine. On June 27 and 28, Project Assistant Lindsay Wozney participated in the Ride to Conquer Cancer. She cycled over 200km in two days through the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Ride to Conquer Cancer participants were required to raise a minimum of \$2,500 each. Money raised will support research that will help develop cancer prevention strategies, as well as more effective treatment options to benefit patients and families.



Welcome to New Participants

If this is your first newsletter, welcome to the *Tomorrow Project*. You are joining almost 30,000 other Albertans who have enrolled in the study since 2000. 3,245 new potential participants were recruited between November 2008 and March 2009 and come from every region of the province. So far over 1,300 of you have returned your 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! Please call us if you have any questions or need a replacement questionnaire. 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.

Please Help Us Keep Our Files Up To Date

Since 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?

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