

Supporting patients travelling from the North for care during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Canadian Partnership Against Cancer – Supporting patients travelling from the North for care during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has created new challenges for patients who come to Ottawa from the North to receive care.

Patients are asked to attend their appointments without their escort and isolation requirements often extend the patients' time away from home.

To support partners, the Partnership provided funding and supports specific to cancer care and COVID-19, for First Nations, Inuit and Métis across Canada.

Ontario Health received funding to provide additional supports to patients who are travelling to Ontario from Nunavut for cancer care while they are away from their home and family.

Carolyn Roberts is Nurse Navigator for the Indigenous Cancer Program at The Ottawa Hospital.

Carolyn Roberts: People from Nunavut, when they come here to Ottawa, a lot of what I do is urban navigation. These are folks from one of the most remote places in Canada, if not on Earth. And you know, the choices are come to Ottawa for healthcare or no care.

One of Carolyn's patients is Debra Evic. She is the third of four daughters and travels to Ottawa regularly for treatment.

Carolyn Roberts: I first met Debra in June of 2016 where she was diagnosed with Stage 4 glioblastoma. In the previous 18 months of meeting Debra she had lost a 23 year-old sister to a gastric cancer, also with glioblastoma. And she had lost a 15 year-old sister to glioblastoma. Vanessa, the 11 year-old sister you see in this video, she also carries the gene.

With Partnership funds, Carolyn was able to provide additional supports to this young cancer patient and her mom, dad and sister while in Ottawa, including an opportunity to take them away from the Cancer Centre and out of the city.

Carolyn Roberts: Before this pandemic our team had always wanted to do some sort of wellness trip with this family, you know, and then this pandemic happened and we were like, "Oh, how are we ever going to organize some sort of trip with all these travel restrictions?" And so when the both of them were here, Vanessa and Debra, at the same time, we were like, "Now is the golden

opportunity.” And then the heavens opened up and you came to us and you offered us \$100,000 for the Inuit, and we took a small portion of that and the stars aligned and we just had this incredible weekend getaway.

We spent the night in Mont-Tremblant, a beautiful hotel. They were tickled pink because they had room service; they’ve never experienced room service before. One of the first things when Debra was diagnosed, she gave me kind of her bucket wish dreams, and it was to swim in a pool, and so for Vanessa as well. So we take it for granted, being in the South, but folks from Nunavut to swim in a pool are a gift! It is such a treat. That Monday all tests were good; they were clear to go into the isolation hotel where they have to wait another two weeks.

Another thing we’d done with the funds you’ve so generously given us is that we’ve created these wellness baskets. We gave cards, activities that they can help pass the time. I just have so much gratitude to you and your organization. I see every day the impact this has had. And so on behalf of Debra and all the Debras out there, thank you.

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