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Radiation Medicine Program, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, University Health Network

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IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE THROUGH INTEGRATED PALLIATIVE CARE IN RADIATION ONCOLOGY

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THE PALLIATIVE RADIATION ONCOLOGY PROGRAM (better known as “PROP”) at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre was established in 1996 with the goal to maximize patient access to palliative care and ultimately, to improve patient outcomes. The PROP clinic sees patients, who are at various stages of their disease, from the time of diagnosis to end of life. Many patients living with advanced cancer, and even those with limited life expectancies can benefit from palliation for symptom relief, significantly improving their quality of life. Patients with metastatic cancer, for example, may have symptoms such as pain, bleeding, dyspnea or neurological compromise caused by metastases arising from the brain, bone, lung or spine. PROP offers rapid assessment and radiotherapy (RT) access to such patients, with the aim of providing local control of tumour growth and promptly alleviating symptoms.

A short course of palliative radiation, typically delivered in 1 to 5 fractions, can be offered soon after the patient is assessed at the PROP clinic. Under certain circumstances, such as for patients suffering from spinal cord compression or severe pain from bone metastases, RT can be delivered on the same day the patient is assessed. A reduction in symptoms can be experienced quickly, within days of starting palliative radiation.

In order to support the evolving needs of cancer patients at various stages of their illness and care, the multidisciplinary PROP team is continually conducting research that informs evidence-based practices to improve patient care. The innovative clinical trials described in this issue provide a glimpse of the breadth of research being conducted within PROP.

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“I have been really impressed at how many support systems are in place for a patient at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre.”

—SARAH WELCH



KAWALPREET SINGH
MBBS, CCRP

LAURA DAWSON
MD, FRCPC

COVER STORY CONTINUED

SARAH WELCH's cancer journey began in 2006, when she was first diagnosed with breast cancer for which she received treatment. Over time, Sarah's disease became metastatic, spreading to other organs, including both her femurs and eyes, causing some vision loss. In September 2014, Sarah was referred to the PROP clinic for symptom relief and within a week, started palliative RT under the care of Dr. Laura Dawson. Her vision improved and has been stable ever since.

Due to the high risk of fracture, Sarah decided to participate in a prospective study examining the role of surgery and/or radiotherapy to treat femoral metastases at the Princess Margaret ([ClinicalTrials.gov ID: NCT01428895](https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/study/NCT01428895)). "The initial radiation treatment was successful, and I was told that I had responded well. Having made the decision to join the clinical trial, I am extremely glad I did. Participation in this trial had no negative impact whatsoever on my treatment or treatment options. Treatment decisions were made solely on the basis of what was in my best interest."

The PROP team strives to improve the care of patients in need of palliation through high-impact research, ranging from large multicentre trials investigating the novel uses of palliative RT, to studies examining methods to reduce treatment-related side effects. Thanks to patients like Sarah, PROP is able to contribute to the growing body of medical information that influences patient care. "I know that in the treatment of my cancer I have benefited from the results of past clinical trials. It is nice to know that by participating in this or any other clinical trial, you will be helping future cancer patients receive the best possible treatment." PROP is also grateful to the Allan and Ruth Kerbel Family for their continued commitment and support to the program.

"I am so grateful to be a patient at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre.

I feel confident in my treatment and feel really lucky to have access to one of the leading cancer hospitals in the world."

—SARAH WELCH



SARAH WELCH

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PALLIATIVE RADIOTHERAPY TRIALS AT RMP

SARIKA GILL MBBS, CCRP, GDCE
CLINICAL RESEARCH COORDINATOR
CLINICAL RESEARCH PROGRAM



Palliative Radiotherapy for Symptomatic Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC) and Liver Metastases

PI – Laura Dawson

This randomized phase III study examines whether patients with symptomatic liver tumours, who undergo best supportive care (BSC) plus a single fraction of radiotherapy (8 Gy) to the liver, experience a significant improvement in symptoms compared to patients receiving BSC alone.

Eligible Patients: Patients with end-stage, painful HCC or liver metastases.

[ClinicalTrials.gov ID: NCT02511522](https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/study/NCT02511522)

Immunotherapy and Palliative Radiotherapy

PI – Laura Dawson

This prospective clinical study evaluates the safety and efficacy of combining palliative RT with immunotherapy in patients with advanced cancers requiring palliative radiation.

Eligible Patients: Patients with metastatic or locally advanced solid cancers, who are taking or about to start immunotherapy, and also require palliative RT for symptom control.

[ClinicalTrials.gov ID: NCT03042156](https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/study/NCT03042156)

Palliative Radiation of Advanced Central Lung Tumours with Intentional Avoidance of the Esophagus

Local PI – Andrea Bezjak

Palliative thoracic radiotherapy is effective for symptom prevention and improvement in patients with lung cancer; however, esophagitis is a common side effect. This randomized phase III study aims to compare esophageal-sparing intensity-modulated radiation therapy (IMRT) vs. standard palliative RT in these patients.

Eligible Patients: Patients with metastatic/locally advanced lung cancer.

[ClinicalTrials.gov ID: NCT02752126](https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/study/NCT02752126)

For more information about these trials, please contact RMP Research Referrals: RMP-ResearchReferrals@rmp.uhn.ca

DID YOU KNOW?

THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM IN PALLIATIVE CARE

CHRISTINE ZYWINE RN(EC)
NURSE PRACTITIONER

JOANNA JAVOR MRT(T)
CLINICAL SPECIALIST RADIATION THERAPIST

THE PROP CLINIC AT THE PRINCESS MARGARET is able to provide patients with rapid access to quality care due to the commitment and collaborative efforts of a talented, multi-professional team comprised of: radiation oncologists with expertise in various disease sites; medical physicists; palliative radiation planners; nurses; a clinical specialist radiation therapist (CSRT); nurse practitioner (NP); referral coordinator; program manager; and trainees, including clinical fellows. This team of specialists works together to coordinate patient care, from triaging referrals to the seamless delivery of palliative RT, drawing on each individual team member's expertise at every step.

The nurse practitioner and clinical specialist radiation therapist play an integral role in the delivery of quality care at PROP. The palliative CSRT works with the multidisciplinary PROP team to ensure the provision of continuity of care by minimizing delays and expediting the process of patient assessment, consent and care plan formulation for patients, ultimately improving the patient experience.

The NP functions as a clinical expert and works collaboratively with the radiation oncologists, nursing staff and radiation therapists. The NP also has an autonomous practice and sees patients during the course of their treatment for issues related to side effects, pain and symptom management, or psychosocial issues. Within the scope of practice, the NP is able to independently diagnose, prescribe and manage these issues. With the aim of palliative care to prevent and relieve suffering, the NP can also offer primary palliative care, including advanced care planning and goals-of-care discussions. One of the most rewarding aspects of this role is the education and personalized support that can be given to patients in an unhurried fashion.



CHRISTINE ZYWINE
RN(EC)

JOANNA JAVOR
MRT(T)

HOW TO FIND US

FOR YOUR REFERRALS

We offer three ways to facilitate your requests for consultation:

1. Site Group Coordinators

Site group coordinators serve as a liaison for referring physicians, radiation oncologists and the Princess Margaret Patient Referral Centre.

2. Princess Margaret New Patient Referral Centre

Tel: 416.946.4575
Fax: 416.946.2900

3. Direct to Specific Radiation Oncologists

Referrals to specific radiation oncologists should be directed to site group coordinators.

Palliative Radiation Oncology Program (PROP)

Direct palliative radiation referral patients to our PROP coordinator. Within 24 hours, she will contact you with an appointment. Patients will be seen within a few days.
PROPReferrals@rmp.uhn.ca

Emergencies For patients requiring same day consultations (e.g. spinal cord compression), please contact our Palliative Radiation Oncology referral coordinator (416.946.2901) who will identify the radiation oncologist that is best able to respond to your requests.

Coordinator **Melanie Robson**
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After-Hour Requests

Please page the radiation oncologist on call through the switchboard at 416.946.2000.

UPDATED DECEMBER 2017

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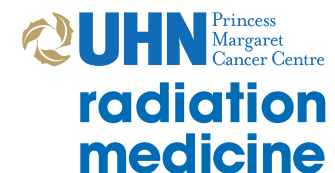
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