

Unique cardiovascular disease prevention strategy hits the region

By STEVE NEWMAN
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Significant lifestyle issues are leaving many Renfrew County residents with a high level of cardiovascular disease, so 14 health partners teamed up to launch the Champlain Cardiovascular Disease Prevention Strategy Jan. 9.

It is hoped the initiative will become a worldwide template for other healthcare providers, as 14 health and community partners work to see its citizens become the most heart-healthy and stroke-free in Canada.

At a time when half of the Ontario government's budget is dedicated to health care, the timing may be ideal.

Members of the network's board of directors include Renfrew Victoria Hospital CEO Randy Penney who says something has to be done to break the cycle.

"We have to do something different," said Penney. "We can't continue at the pace we are."

More federal and provincial funds are being sought, but Pfizer Canada Inc., has committed \$2.5 million over five years. Dr. Robert Cushman, one of the spokesman for the Champlain Cardiovascular Disease Prevention Network, estimates it will cost about \$3 million to service the Champlain district's population of 1.1 million with the network's strategy.

Dr. Cushman, the former chief medical officer for the City of Ottawa, is also the chief executive officer for the Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN).

Pfizer's medical director and vice-president, Dr. Bernard Prigent, said: "Together we will fight cardiovascular disease by improving the way medicines are used and by working on manageable risk factors.

"We believe this is a great investment in Champlain residents' heart and stroke health, and it could be used as a model for the rest of Canada."

Such projects, Dr. Prigent told *The Mercury*, are valuable if they're fully independent, as he says this one will be. "The scope of the prevention network and the way they've set it up has resonated strongly with Pfizer," said Dr. Prigent, in stressing the need for tools the health community can use.

Dr. Cushman said the five-year strategy is really building on an existing foundation. For example, smoking-cessation programs are already in place in hospitals across the region. CEO Penney says the smoking-cessation program has had a powerful and successful impact on hospitalized patients and staff members.

While the smoking-cessation program has reached about 20 hospitals in the region, that doesn't mean all other practices within CCPN will be region-wide. Some areas may require more targeting for certain issues.

"It's not one size fits all," says Dr. Cushman. "We want to concentrate in certain areas. It's targeting the intervention."

Such an initiative is vital, says Dr. Andrew Pipe, chair of the Champlain Cardiovascular Disease Prevention Network (CCPN) and medical director of University of Ottawa's Minto Prevention and Rehabilitation Centre.

"Every day that we treat heart disease and stroke, we're reminded that more and more of our residents are simply not adopting and maintaining a healthy lifestyle," he said in a news release.

"As a result, each year more than 2,400 residents in the Champlain District die of heart disease and stroke. We can prevent 80 per cent of premature deaths if we identify and begin to manage those important risk factors early."

The Champlain district covers a huge territory that covers much of eastern Ontario, including Renfrew County and the City of Ottawa.

According to Statistics Canada and the Provincial Health Planning Database, heart disease and stroke are the leading cause of death, disability and hospitalization in Ontario and within the Champlain District. Particularly hard hit are the counties of Renfrew, Lanark, Leeds and Grenville, and Prescott-Russell. They also have higher disease and death rates than the City of Ottawa and the provincial average. For example, the percentage of the population smoking is about 13 per cent in Ottawa and 22 per cent in Renfrew County, says Dr. Cushman.

Among CCPN's 14 partners are the University of Ottawa Heart Institute, area health units, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, the Champlain Local Health Integration Network, the Ottawa Hospital and the Champlain Regional Stroke Centre.

Focus on disease prevention

One of the leading philosophies in the Champlain Cardiovascular Disease Prevention Network's strategy is health practitioners' focus more on disease prevention, rather than on disease treatment.

"We're starting out," said Dr. Cushman, in seeking to articulate how the CCPN will work. "This is our infancy, but we want to get to the point that the people in Cham-

plain LHIN know what we're targeting and how personally they're doing with respect to those targets."

CCPN's six major initiatives with the prevention strategy deal with primary care, specialty care, hospitals, schools, workplaces and communities. Those initiatives are:

1. Improved delivery of cardiovascular care, to improve how family physicians work with their patients to prevent and manage cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk factors.

2. Champlain Hospital CVD Prevention Network, to ensure heart attack patients are sent home with appropriate medication and information on lifestyle modification.

3. A smoking cessation network to identify and offer cessation treatment to all hospitalized smokers.

4. Help for residents to gain knowledge and skills so they can understand and manage CVD risk factors.

5. School-age children initiatives to address the trend of rising obesity in children.

6. A surveillance program that produces a virtual scorecard of relevant, timely and ongoing data to support the prevention of cardiovascular disease.

To run the prevention strategy the way they want to, to make a difference, will cost a little more than \$3 per person in the district, estimates Dr. Cushman.

"We can continue to pump money into the hospital system, or we can work together to prevent heart disease and stroke from happening in the first place," says Dr. Cushman, who hopes the strategy will gain notoriety with the help of physicians, media coverage, and posters at schools.

"It's going to take time," he said. Echoing a comment from colleague Dr. Andrew Pipe, he says it will mean doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.

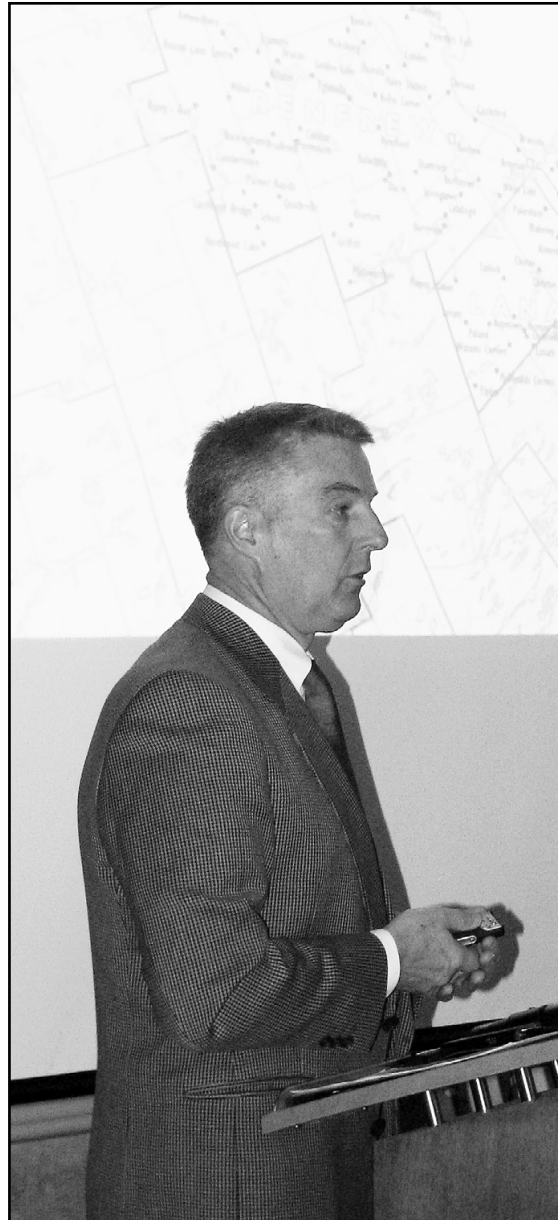
The hope is the prevention strategy, if funded completely, will result in full-time employment for a half-dozen or so people.

Dr. Cushman is also optimistic, believing the strategy can become "the envy of everywhere."

As for those sitting at home reading this article, they too can start making a difference as soon as today.

Start with reducing Canadians' tendency to huge meal portions, says Dr. Cushman. And read labels and avoid such products as soft drinks and fruit drinks (not fruit juice), he adds.

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Dr. Robert Cushman is a spokesman for the Champlain Cardiovascular Disease Prevention Network's five-year strategy. Mercury photo by STEVE NEWMAN