Aboriginal Cancer Control Progress Report
Kimberly Morrisseau, Coordinator of Aboriginal Services

Introduction:
Cancer is the fastest-growing health concern among Manitoba’s First Nations, Inuit and Metis populations. Previous statistics illustrated this disease as being relatively low in comparison to the overall Canadian cancer rates; however, this is no longer the case. Ontario studies show that Aboriginal peoples’ cancer rates are disproportionately increasing in comparison to overall Canadian cancer rates. They also found that these groups tend to present with later-stage cancers and have higher mortality rates from preventable cancers. These finding suggest possible accessibility issues for cancer programs and services.

Our efforts to address this issue began with an early outline of an Aboriginal Cancer Control Strategy announced in 2005. This strategy’s aim was to engage Aboriginal communities around specific initiatives that will:

1. Improve cancer awareness among Aboriginal peoples (early detection and prevention);
2. Create a culturally appropriate environment for Aboriginal peoples at CancerCare Manitoba (ensure positive policies and procedures); and
3. Improve services for Aboriginal cancer patients.

Overall Progress Summary:
As a means to demonstrate CCMB’s commitment to addressing this health issue, we began with determining ways that we could create a culturally appropriate environment for Aboriginal peoples at CancerCare Manitoba.

To date we have:

1. **Two members of the CancerCare Manitoba board who are of Aboriginal descent.**
2. **A memorandum-of-understanding with WRHA’s Aboriginal Health Services.** We have free access to their:
   a. Patient Advocate
   b. Spiritual/Cultural Care
   c. Community Liaison
   d. Language/Interpreter Services
   e. Discharge Planning and Coordination
3. **CCMB’s Aboriginal Cultural Safety Training for all CCMB employees.** We have contracted Aboriginal consultant, Sawano Pinesiwan Inc. (Greg and Ruth Murdock) to facilitate the two-day mandatory training to educate CCMB staff about Aboriginal cultural issues. As of February 28, 2009, 253 employees have attended the training with an anticipated total of 332 employees (nearly 50%) trained by the end of June 2009.
4. **Initiated curriculum development specialized for CCMB’s oncologists.** A national environmental scan has identified potential partnerships for a national approach.
5. **Initiated the establishment of a CCMB Aboriginal Community Partnership Committee.** A group of 15 Aboriginal representatives, along with CCMB representatives, will develop an
Aboriginal Cancer Control Strategy designed to address the unique needs and priorities of First Nations, Inuit and Metis people of Manitoba.

In response to our second and third strategy aim of improving cancer awareness and cancer services for Aboriginal people burdened with cancer, we have two main initiatives:

1. **CancerCare Manitoba-Norway House Cree Nation Cancer Services Adaptation Initiative.**
   This as a federally funded project through the Aboriginal Health Transition Fund (AHTF) – adaptation envelope designed to develop a culturally appropriate cancer system to facilitate early diagnosis, intervention and treatment of cancer in Norway House Cree Nation.

2. **Canadian Institute for Health Research (CIHR) Grant(s).**
   One of the challenges with understanding the true cancer burden among First Nations, Inuit and Metis in Manitoba is the lack of scientific research. Previous Manitoba-based studies are dated or limited in their ability to be generalized. CCMB staff (Epidemiology/Aboriginal Services), the University of Manitoba’s Centre for Aboriginal Research, and Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs have partnered together to address this information gap. Two projects that are underway are the ‘Manitoba First Nations Health Report Card: A Collaborative Network Project to Reduce Health Disparities’ and the ‘Access to Quality Cancer Care for Manitoba First Nations and Non-First Nations’. The recent availability of the Indian Registry System file will enable linkage with CCMB’s Cancer Registry for surveillance and care patterns of Manitoba’s First Nations.