Linking Naturopathic and Conventional Medicine in the Fight Against Cancer

By Heidi Vincent

Ottawa clinician-scientists and brothers Drs. Dugald and Andrew Seely have received the largest-ever North American grant to study naturopathic medicine in combination with conventional medicine. The funding was announced in October by the Ottawa Integrative Cancer Centre (OICC) — an arm of the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine (CCNM) — and the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute (OHRI).

Naturopathic Doctor Dugald Seely, the Executive Director of the OICC and Director of Research at CCNM, is co-lead of the project. Dr. Andrew Seely, also co-lead, is an associate scientist at The Ottawa Hospital, Director of Research for its Division of Thoracic Surgery, and an associate professor at the University of Ottawa. Their recent $3.85 million grant will fund a project called the Thoracic Peri-Operative Integrative Surgical Care Evaluation (Thoracic POISE).

Intended to study the use of integrative treatments for esophageal, gastric, and lung cancer patients who will undergo surgery, the project’s goals are twofold. First, it will pioneer integrative care interventions before and after surgery. Second, it will fund a randomized trial to evaluate if integrative naturopathic care reduces adverse events and improves quality of life and survival. A multi-centred network of Canadian thoracic surgery centres, in partnership with naturopathic doctors, will collaborate over the next 11 years in this 300-patient study.

“Lung cancer accounts for the highest incidence of cancer deaths in Canada and we know that cancer patients use complementary therapies,” says Dugald. “This research will help determine when complementary care is appropriate, and may potentially lead to improved medical practice that can positively impact patients’ lives.”

When Terry Vida was diagnosed with cancer, she worked with her medical and naturopathic doctors to explore ways to combine naturopathic and conventional treatments including chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery. Vida used natural health products, acupuncture, exercise, and nutrition to do everything possible to deal with her cancer. “I have been cancer-free for two years now,” says Vida. “I feel as though this approach helped me a lot and it is through research such as this that we will really know.”