



## Babes4Breasts and the OICC

**Y**ou have cancer. Breast cancer. Those are words that can instantaneously send bad chills up and down your spine and take your breath away in the worst way. A cancer diagnosis can leave a person feeling helpless and all alone, and, understandably, wanting care to start right away. The problem is it isn't that simple. For some, there can be a waiting period from the time of diagnosis to treatment. That time in between, which can last anywhere from four to ten weeks can seem heartwrenchingly and excruciatingly slow as you wait to find out what path your conventional care will take. You want information, you want details as fast possible. The good news is there is a lot an individual can do to prepare for the challenges they are about to face. That is where the Ottawa Integrative Cancer Centre (OICC) can help and thanks to a collaboration with Babes4Breasts, a new program will be up and running in the fall to help fill that void between diagnosis to treatment.

In a nutshell, the OICC is a not-for-profit that welcomes patients at any stage and those wishing to prevent cancer or its recurrence. It provides whole-person cancer care alongside conventional treatments to improve the quality of life, and to extend life where possible. The Centre works with patients and physicians, to provide therapeutic programs that

decrease side effects and promote health during and after conventional treatments. Through clinical practice, research and education, the OICC strives to assess and reduce possible causes of cancer while exploring innovative integrative treatment approaches. It is the first integrative cancer care and research centre of its kind in Central and Eastern Canada.

Babes4Breasts  
**HEAD START**  
PROGRAM



The Centre is forging new alliances to offer new programs. That outreach has led to some great partnerships, including the *Babes4Breasts Head Start Program*. Announced in June, it was established for women newly diagnosed with breast cancer

*Babes4Breasts* (B4B) is a group of Canadian recording artists who have come together to fight breast cancer through music. Its mission is to use the power of music to raise funds and awareness for breast cancer prevention, education, and support via conventional and integrative strategies, by way of a community-based approach. Since 2007, B4B has held concerts across Canada featuring a variety of talented Canadian musicians including James Keelaghan, Matthew Barber, Tanya Tagaq, Juno-Award winner Amanda Rheaume, Leela Gilday, and Annabelle Chvostek to name a few, and of course, Babes Founder Ana Miura grace the stage. So far, they have donated over \$100,000 to a variety of breast cancer-related charities. In addition to the concert, the Babes produce a CD. The concerts are unique evenings. The singers/songwriters perform in a song circle; taking turns sharing songs and stories. All have been touched somehow by breast cancer.

This year, the OICC will be the beneficiary of the *Babes4Breasts*

efforts. The Babes Benefit Concert and release of the 2014 compilation album, will take place on Thursday, October 23rd at Southminster United Church in Ottawa. Shortly after that, the Program will be up and running at the OICC.

A collaboration between the Babes and the OICC is a natural fit. The Head Start Program will help women with breast cancer to understand the range of issues that are poorly addressed when first diagnosed, enabling them to feel less alone and confused. Miura said the Babes are excited to participate in the *Head Start Program*. “Through a combination of education, empowerment, and hands-on lifestyle modifications, this program will help ensure better health outcomes in the Ottawa region for those who are newly diagnosed with breast cancer and are facing the biggest challenge of their lifetime.”

In fact, improved quality of life, reduced side effects, reduced anxiety and depression, increased stamina, and better overall health outcomes will all be explored through weekly workshops with OICC therapists. The program will empower women to be their best advocates, as they learn about the role of nutrition, natural health products, exercise, mind body techniques, stress management, and lifestyle modifications in coping with, and fighting, breast cancer.

The OICC spent some time researching and conducting needs assessments to make sure the program would respond to what patients need and want. It held focus groups to brainstorm.

Here is how the Program will work. Patients will meet each week for three hours at a time, working closely with OICC therapists in a group setting. Each three-hour workshop will focus on empowerment and support in key areas.

One of the big challenges for anyone facing a major disease, including cancer, is navigating through the

health-care system. It can be a horribly daunting experience. Through the Program, participants will learn what resources exist in the community and how to make the right decisions for themselves. This is golden for newly diagnosed cancer patients. Terry Vida was diagnosed with breast cancer a few years ago and has since recovered. Now a member of the OICC Community Advisory Board, Vida participated in one of the focus groups and said this type of information is critical. “When you’ve

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been diagnosed, it is all new. You get information, and don’t know what to do with it. Friends and family want to help but you don’t know how they can and that all creates more stress, ironically enough.” She explains that a program like Head Start is “fantastic because it will help you figure out some things and then let you be decisive on what you need.”

Participants will learn about integrative therapies for cancer such as proactive options for health, including an in-depth understanding of the role of nutrition, natural health products, exercise, mind body techniques, stress management, and lifestyle modifications that can assist them in coping with and fighting breast cancer.

They learn visualization, yoga and breath work to develop positive health habits that will assist each woman physically, emotionally and mentally. Vida said that “I had to figure it all out on my own” and what the Program will do is bring all the pieces together, providing the big picture, allowing for healing to begin.

Not to be forgotten is the emotional reality of living with cancer. Participants will learn coping techniques to assist in dealing with aspects of their life that may shift as a result of a cancer diagnosis.

Last but not least, each participant will follow a personalized naturopathic treatment plan that will strengthen body, mind and spirit, again, looking at the person as a whole, to improve quality of life, reduce effects and help prevent recurrence.

The whole educational program is a new, novel approach in health care. Vida says she was also supportive of the Program because, among other things, “it will help prepare women for the journey. It will help them plan because once you start on your healing journey, you may feel sick and frustrated. It can be too difficult to make decisions. You can embark without any sense of direction but planning can help you ride those hard waves.” With *Babes4Breasts Head Start*, that planning starts with immediate action.

One of the interesting characteristics about the Program is the group dynamic. Others may ask questions another patient may not have thought about. The result is just adding to the pool of knowledge, and if wanted, new friendships may just evolve from the experience. At a minimum, women will know they are not alone. In fact, they won’t be alone on any part of their journey. The OICC and its team will be there every step of the way, helping them on their healing process, making the mind, body and spirit stronger ■