

# NATIONAL AWARD A TRIBUTE TO WORK OF LONGTIME REGISTERED NURSE

## CATHY FOSTER HAS SPENT MOST OF HER CAREER AT JO BRANT HOSPITAL

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After four decades of caring for the sick, many of them people with cancer, Cathy Foster is slowly preparing to begin looking after herself - in retirement.

The longtime Registered Nurse put a cap on her lengthy career by winning the Myeloma Canada Marion State Nursing Award in late 2017.

In 2012, Myeloma Canada created the award to recognize excellence in myeloma nursing care. Myeloma is a cancer of plasma cells, a type of white blood cell normally responsible for producing antibodies.

Foster, 62, started her nursing career at Wellesley Hospital in Toronto from 1978-80; she has been at Joseph Brant Hospital since 1980.

She has worked in the

cancer clinic since 1992 and has been a primary hematology nurse for more than 10 years, the only one in the clinic. She educates patients and their families about various medical conditions, specifically blood-related disease issues and chemotherapy.

"We are very fortunate here in the clinic to have Cathy on staff. She is one of our most senior and experienced nurses. She provides tireless care to her patients and supports our hematology program with superior dedication and expertise," said Tracy Fazzari, manager of oncology and ambulatory care at Joseph Brant Hospital.

"I am not surprised that this modest and brilliant woman has received this award ... Her leadership and guidance to the group are impressive.

"I have observed Cathy

interacting with her patients and appreciate the empathy and skill she relays to them continuously. She is always eager to collaborate with the physician group as well and provides continuous initiative to maintain and support growth within the clinic," Fazzari added.

Foster said she is "very honoured" to receive the Marion State Memorial Myeloma Nursing Award.

"I have a number of duties that I do daily, but the most rewarding is meeting with new patients and their families and providing education and support throughout their cancer journey.

"I answer lots of questions - 'telephone triage.' I do assist with bone marrow (biopsies) but do very little hands-on now. I used to do a lot of chemotherapy (treatments)."

Foster said there were days in her career when she did as many as seven bone marrow biopsies dur-

ing a day shift; those days she refers to as a 'marrow-thon.'

For a number of years now Foster's primary duty has been to access different compassionate programs through the Ontario government and contact drug companies so that patients without the means to afford expensive cancer medications can get enrolled in a program that will cover part or all of their ongoing costs.

"It's a big chunk of my time, but it's important. There are so many new drugs that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, and some people will be on them forever.

"It's a challenge because you have to learn all the new drugs and combinations and side effects."

Foster says a diagnosis of any type of cancer can be devastating and that her group of medical professionals in the clinic is there to provide guidance and comfort.

Her team consists of two hematologists, a social worker, nurse practitioners, a dietitian and a manager. The clinic itself has eight nurses.

"People come in anxious. There is a lot of hand-holding and a lot of emotional support ... The hardest part is to be with the patient and family when they've been given bad news.

"The best part is seeing a patient 'graduate,' where the doctor says they are cancer free; that's a wonderful thing.

"I am privileged to work with a fantastic team here in the clinic. I've seen amazing changes in cancer treatment since starting my career here."

Foster said some lymphomas (immune system cancers) are curable and that the Jo Brant oncology clinic has had patients with it for five years and then they are discharged cured.

As an example, Foster said she worked with one

young woman with lymphoma in the early 1990s. They were both young mothers at the time. The woman was cured and now volunteers in the clinic.

"Some of the diseases we're treating in hematology, I've been lucky to have some patients for 20 years in treatment. Some (cancers) have become chronic diseases.

"(But) some come to us very sick and, despite our best efforts, succumb quickly," noted Foster, adding she has attended some patients' funerals.

"In general, the advancements and treatment options have made an impact on the life expectancy of our patients," said Foster, noting the trend in cancer treatment outcomes over her time is people living longer and with a better quality of life - with some being cured.

Foster was nominated for the Marion State award by Norma Lindner, a committee member of the Sup-

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