

Getting a Grip on Arthritis: A National Primary Health Care Community Initiative

The **Getting a Grip on Arthritis** project will increase the capacity of Canadian primary health care providers, communities and people with arthritis to manage the burden of arthritis.

The project emphasizes prevention, early detection (distinguishing rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis), local comprehensive care, and more appropriate and timely access to specialty care and self-management strategies.

This project is being funded until March 31, 2006 by the Primary Health Care Transition Fund (**Health Canada**).

Thirty workshops for primary health care practitioners (physicians, nurse practitioners, physiotherapists, etc.) are being delivered in five regions across Canada. Workshops are followed by reinforcement activities in each community health centre.

The national project is based on a pilot project conducted in Ontario. The Ontario pilot project partnered with the Association of Ontario Health Centres, a CACHCA member network. When it came time to roll the project out nationally, it made sense to partner with the national body, CACHCA.

In 2004, CACHCA was asked to partner with the **Getting a Grip on Arthritis** project. The interdisciplinary and holistic approach to chronic disease management meshed well with CACHCA's values and approach to the delivery of primary health care.

Getting a Grip on Arthritis marks the first time **The Arthritis Society** has implemented a Canada-wide arthritis training program for health care providers. The program enhances the skills of primary health care providers and improves their ability to diagnose the disease and provide helpful advice to patients. Health care providers also learn about local community resources and about the importance of early referral to a specialist for people with more severe arthritis.

The **Getting a Grip on Arthritis** program includes six components in which CACHCA was able to participate and/or lend assistance:

1. Defining a community health centre

The first stage of implementation of the Getting a Grip project is targeted towards community health centres (CHCs). The Getting a Grip on Arthritis project stresses the value of interdisciplinary teams. In this stage CACHCA member CHCs and CHCs that fit closely with the CACHCA definition of a CHC—a community health centre employing, for the most part, a salaried interdisciplinary health care team—were invited to participate.

2. Recruiting CHCs to participate in the project

The extensive CACHCA network of CHCs was the starting point for project organizers wishing to invite CHCs to participate in the project and attend workshops across Canada. CACHCA provided contact information for member CHCs and encouraged them to participate in the project.

3. Assessing the learning needs of primary health care providers and their patients with arthritis. (Assessments will also be done of community resources for people with arthritis.)

Because of the interdisciplinary approach to primary health care, community health centres have a readily available and accessible team of primary health care providers under one roof including physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, dietitians/nutritionists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, etc.

Having the team of health care providers and patients in one location facilitated the assessment of the learning needs of providers and patients. Also, because of the community involvement in the CHC, assessing community resources for people with chronic illnesses like arthritis, was more readily and easily accommodated. Through the Getting a Grip on Arthritis project, patient needs were assessed through 8 focus groups with CHC patients.

4. Training workshops for primary health care providers to learn more about the diagnosis and treatment of arthritis, offered in regions across Canada.

The ability of the CHCs to bring together so many different health care professionals for the workshops increased the number of health care professionals trained. The workshops promote the team approach to care and self-management of chronic illnesses like arthritis.

5. Methods for reinforcing that training, through newsletters, follow-up workshops and other means.

Because CHCs are part of the local communities, they are in a good position to get the word out to their own team of health care providers and the greater community. They also have the means of assisting with the reinforcement training through their own newsletters and their interdisciplinary staffs' access to professional associations.

6. Ongoing evaluation of the program and its objectives through surveys of primary health care providers and their patients.

Because of the ‘one-stop’ aspect of CHC care, the Getting a Grip on Arthritis team has easier access to health care providers and patients to obtain survey responses.

Getting a Grip on Arthritis is a joint initiative involving The Arthritis Society and the following partners:

- **Arthritis Community Research and Evaluation Unit**
- **Arthritis Health Professions Association**
- **Canadian Alliance of Community Health Centre Associations**
- **Canadian Nurses Association**
- **Canadian Rheumatology Association**
- **Patient Partners® in Arthritis**
- **Sunnybrook and Women’s College Health Sciences Centre**
- **The Arthritis Society**
- **Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care**
- **Health Canada**