

## A Success Story of Support Calgary, Alberta

It began with a vision and grew into a reality. It was 2011 and Dr. Charlene Fell recognized the need for support for patients with Pulmonary Fibrosis. Kirk Mathison, RN responded to this commitment to quality care by creating the first Pulmonary Fibrosis Support Group in Calgary. In January 2013 the invitation was sent out to people diagnosed with Pulmonary Fibrosis and in March we met for the first time. From that first announcement to today the support group has grown, changed, and made a difference in the lives of many.

Each Pulmonary Fibrosis patient is faced with many worries and questions and struggles with feelings and concerns unique to their situation. Being together in an empathetic, supportive environment can be the difference between coping and coping well. No support group can replace the medical care patients require, but it is a valuable resource of connection, community and caring.

Whether one attends for advice, information or just to be around others, our support group has helped move patients and families forward. This group has helped each of us realize that we are not alone - that there are other people who are going through similar circumstances; others who have the same debilitating disease. For many of us who had never heard of Pulmonary Fibrosis before the doctor made a diagnosis it was a revelation and a relief to know that support was there.

The Calgary Support Groups is an informal, educational team. Monthly topics and guest speakers help us learn more about PF, explore ways to manage PF, meet others living with PF and get answers to our questions. Family members, friends and caregivers are always invited to attend the monthly meetings. Most meetings see between 30 - 45 people attend. Another 4 - 10 patients and family members from Red Deer and Medicine Hat join the group through teleconferencing. During the 1.5 hour meeting a Respiratory Therapist from Respiratory Home Care Solutions, is on hand to oversee oxygen needs for those attending.

Each month focuses on a specific topic and the knowledge and expertise of our speakers has been exceptional. Topics that you may find on the agenda during the year include Using Home Oxygen, Advocacy, Lung Transplantation, Travel Insurance, Pulmonary Rehab, Managing Fatigue, Coping with Anxiety and Depression, Advanced care Planning, Family Caregiver Support and Drug Therapies.



A special thank you to the Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation for their encouragement and financial support during our initial start-up. Working together with a focus on research, patient support and advocacy is a valuable partnership.

From our group a Calgary Steering committee has been formed, committing energy and time to building a strong awareness program in the city with a vision on further initiatives to support PF patients and families.

Kirk can be proud of the work he has done in building a strong, well-functioning group. The organization is paramount to the success of a support group: up-to-date, reliable information, regular scheduled meetings, ongoing communication, a confidentiality policy and a welcoming, open-door atmosphere. The Calgary Pulmonary Fibrosis Support group is definitely a 'Success Story of Support'!