

August 29, 2014

Dear Friends,

I have an important message for you about cancer.

You don't have to travel to downtown Toronto for top-notch treatment because you have access to some of the best cancer care available, right here at the hospitals of Rouge Valley.

When I was completing my specialist training in cancer surgery, my colleagues asked me why I was moving out to the surrounding community instead of staying at one of the big downtown teaching hospitals. I told them I felt that I had an obligation to take my knowledge and share it, so that people who live in Scarborough, Pickering or Ajax have access at their local hospitals to the most advanced cancer care available.

Rouge Valley is already ahead of many other community hospitals and even some downtown hospitals because we're using advanced techniques in our cancer surgeries. Combine that practice with our unique Early Recovery After Surgery program and our patients are feeling better quicker and are getting back to their normal activities sooner.

But cancer care is a rapidly changing area of medicine. We're learning more all the time and making huge improvements in our ability to treat and remove the disease from our patients. And that's why I'm writing today.

I need your help to make sure Rouge Valley can keep up. Will you make a thoughtful gift today? Your donations are the key to ensuring Rouge Valley's cancer care team has the tools and training our patients need.

And will you also please consider signing up for a convenient and budget-friendly monthly donation? It would mean a lot to me knowing that I can rely on you year round to provide the very latest advances for our cancer patients.

The truth is it's donors like you that make sure Rouge Valley has some of the key equipment needed to treat people with cancer close to home. A person's battle with cancer is much more difficult, uncomfortable and frustrating when you have to travel downtown, maybe get stuck in traffic, or worry whether your family will be able to visit you after surgery.

As I specialized more, while working at the big teaching hospitals in Toronto, I started to think about how difficult it would be for my family if they had to face this situation.

That's why Rouge Valley was the perfect fit with its excellent cancer care program.

Do you know that there is a team of people here who come together regularly and combine their expertise and diagnosis to create the best treatment options for each cancer patient?

Surgeons like me meet with specialists from medical oncology (who know about the disease the best), pathology (who read lab and biopsy results the best), radiology (who analyze x-rays, ultrasound and MRI the best), plastic surgeons, as well as anesthesia (who know the best type of medication to use in the operating room so that you have a faster and better recovery after surgery). Almost futuristically, we also video conference with radiation oncologists at top cancer hospitals to make use of their unique skills and experiences.

You can imagine how much equipment and technology is used by each of these experts to ensure every individual cancer patient has the best diagnosis, treatment and recovery plan.

I know that because the community supports the hospital, Rouge Valley is able to keep up with the dizzying advances in cancer care. When it comes right down to it, your support makes a huge difference for our patients.

Can I tell you a quick story that really struck home for me?

A little while ago, I met Michelle. She stands out in my mind because she is exactly one year younger than me, with a husband and small children. Michelle had just been diagnosed with breast cancer that required a mastectomy, and she immediately thought the worst – that she would probably die within a year. I spoke with her for a long time that day, trying to reassure her, but she was shaken and crying, deeply worried about what her family would do without her.

I could see she needed a little time, so I invited her for a follow-up visit a few days later and asked one of my colleagues, a plastic and reconstructive surgeon, to join us. Together, we discussed Michelle's treatment choices and options for recovery and assured her that our surgical team would work together to make sure she could have an immediate breast reconstruction. Michelle began to see there was a lot of hope.

...continued

It really touched me how I could make a difference for Michelle by bringing our team together and offering her the best and latest treatments available in Canada.

I saw her again shortly after the surgery and reconstruction. She entered the clinic like a totally different person with a new outlook on life. Our multi-disciplinary approach to health care enabled her ask confidently, “Okay, so what’s next?” Michelle just finished her chemotherapy this summer. She’s doing so well. I am proud that we could manage all her cancer care right here in her community.

You’ll be pleased to know that since I arrived at Rouge Valley about three years ago, I have seen that all of our cancer patients like Michelle are receiving the exact same level of care that they would have at a downtown hospital.

This is thanks to your support and careful investment of donor dollars.

You see, cancer surgeons like me rely on technology to help our patients. For example, a lot of surgery is now ‘minimally-invasive’. That means we are performing surgery through a small ‘key-hole’ incision using very small instruments, all guided by a tiny camera. I’m sure you can imagine how important it is for me to see exactly what I’m doing.

I only have the camera and the screen to guide the instruments I use inside your body. And I’m certain you can understand how absolutely critical it is that my monitor is displaying the very best image from the camera, especially to ensure I remove the entire tumour.

That’s why my surgical colleagues and I are always asking for the latest screens and cameras. Just imagine being in surgery for three hours, looking at a monitor. The quality of that image, and having a more advanced camera, all makes a huge difference in the success of the surgery.

Recently, I received a picture and a thank you card from a patient. Robert has an inherited condition in which polyps form in the colon and eventually turn into colon cancer. The only treatment is to remove a large portion of the colon.

...continued

Robert loves to cycle. He was very concerned that he wouldn't be able to get back on his bike. Luckily, we had the equipment needed to do a 'minimally-invasive' surgery and really reduce the impact on him and his recovery time. In early July, he sent in the photo in the margin. That's him on his bike. He has ridden five thousand kilometres since the surgery, which is a real point of pride for both of us!



This was only possible because our highly-trained, dedicated surgical teams had the right tools.

I can't say it enough... in order to deliver quality care like the downtown hospitals we require top-notch tools. They're needed everywhere... in diagnosis, treatment and recovery.

After all, I think you'd agree it's only fair that someone living in Scarborough, Pickering or Ajax has the same excellent cancer care as someone living in downtown Toronto. I know I want that for my family, too.

Now I just need your help. Will you please share a thoughtful gift today? Your generosity will ensure that our surgical teams have what we need to keep up with the improvements in technology and equipment.

You may prefer to help by making a convenient monthly gift. If you feel as good as I do when you help people, this is a great way to keep that feeling all year round!

Thank you again for joining with me to make sure Rouge Valley can continue to offer the best cancer care to our patients, right in our community. Your kind support will mean that the comfort of home and family is never far away when one of your neighbours or loved ones faces cancer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Zaid Yasser'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Dr. Zaid Yasser
Surgical Oncologist, RVHS

P.S. Your donations ensure my colleagues and I have the tools we need to help cancer patients from our community. Please send your gift today, so we can continue to offer the same excellent standard of cancer care close to home.