

Dr. Patrick McGowan envisioned the Chronic Disease Self-management Program BC about 35 years ago to help people living with chronic diseases and has been a strong force behind it ever since. Dr. McGowan points out how a person with any type of chronic condition only interacts with a health care professional for no more than five to ten hours per year, which is not enough time to learn to deal with something they have to live with, possibly for rest of their life. Dr. McGowan recounts his experiences with assisting patients diagnosed with different types of arthritis during the early years of his career. These patients were doing everything advised by their health care professionals but showed no signs of improvement. Oddly, their abilities were deteriorating despite doing everything right.

Dr. McGowan acknowledges how the inability to take charge of one's own health is often crippling, and with the upsurge in the number of people experiencing chronic health conditions, there is an imperative need for health education programs. He vividly recalls patients asking for skills to manage their own health, skills they can use for rest of the 364 and a half days a year they spend without direct guidance from health care professionals. "Educating people on how to manage their own health is about giving them the confidence and motivation to face the day-to-day challenges that come with chronic health conditions," he says.

Determined to provide the patients affected by some type of chronic health condition autonomy over their own health, Dr. McGowan came across the self-management program at Stanford University while investigating the concept of self-management. He has been working collaboratively with Stanford University ever since to find better ways for his patients to maintain self-sufficiency.

The element that makes this program stand out among the sea of other health education programs is its peer delivery. It teaches them to be self-dependent while working alongside health care professionals. These free, two-and-a-half-hour long workshops pair up two trained individuals with chronic conditions to deliver a six-session program to the group of 10-15 people. The purpose of the program is to teach them tools and techniques to better manage their condition on a daily basis.

Dr. McGowan's vision to help those affected by chronic conditions received support from the BC Ministry of Health in 2002, which helped spread this program throughout the province. Every year Dr. McGowan and the staff at the Ladner satellite office offer approximately 300 of these programs to over 3000 people experiencing chronic health conditions throughout B.C. Once started as an education program to help people with arthritis, the program now covers conditions such as chronic pain, diabetes, and cancer. The program is available online and by telephone to accommodate people in rural areas, those who cannot leave their homes, and those who do not feel comfortable participating in a group. The program is taught in several different languages, including Punjabi and Chinese, and to aboriginal communities.

Along with assisting people in Germany, China and Brazil, and in other provinces around Canada, to adapt the programs to their own contexts, Dr. McGowan successfully evaluated the effectiveness of these programs in 15 randomized control and longitudinal studies. Dr. McGowan's 35-year journey of finding and evaluating ways to assist people with chronic health conditions has helped thousands of people and continues to do so.