

“Take Charge!” is a new program that provides support for people living with chronic illness, such as heart disease, arthritis, and depression. The program is administered by Hamilton Health Sciences in collaboration with other organizations throughout the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN.

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- Helen, *Take Charge!*
Program participant

Patients “Take Charge!” in new community-based program



Helen had been living with a rare inherited progressive disorder that had left her feeling very alone. One day her sister spotted an ad in the Hamilton Spectator for the Take Charge! workshop and encouraged her to sign up. Administered by Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) in collaboration with a number of

organizations and providers throughout the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN (Local Health Integration Network), the program is for anyone who is living with an ongoing health problem. The workshop provided Helen with a network of support that has endured long after the program ended.

“I have just completed the six-week course,” says Helen. “I found it extremely useful. I met approximately 12 exceptionally brave and wonderful people who were all willing to share their experiences and feelings with one another. At first I thought it might be very intimidating, but I found out after the first class that it was going to be very relaxed and with no pressures. I was so happy to find this particular course. I highly recommend it to anyone with a chronic illness.”

The Take Charge! program is being made available at no cost to participants as part of a self-management initiative created by the province of Ontario and funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Take Charge! is a licensed program that was developed at Stanford University. Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) administers the program and collaborates with a number of other organizations and providers throughout the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN (Local Health Integration Network).

The Take Charge! workshops are offered in various accessible locations along bus routes, and have minimal parking fees. To date, Take Charge! has been offered in Hamilton, Stoney Creek, Burlington, Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Fort Erie, Port Colborne and Brantford. A French language version of the workshop has recently launched in Welland, and a Mandarin program is set to launch in Hamilton in February.

Randy, a Take Charge! participant, was skeptical when his nurse suggested that he participate in the program.

“The level of chronic pain was constant day-to-day and I had a number of medical appointments I was attending,” says Randy. “I wasn’t sure if I could fully commit to the program. After a lot of thought, I convinced myself that this could help to motivate me and help in getting my life back together.”

He doesn’t regret his decision.

“I immediately enjoyed the interaction with the other volunteers in the program, and was interested in their stories and the support network that was shared by everyone,” he says. “The material and knowledge I gained was helpful for me in my on-going treatment of my chronic conditions. I strongly recommend this program for anyone experiencing similar health problems.”

The workshops are led by trained leaders in the community who, like Helen and Randy, are living with their own on-going health challenges. They are not necessarily health care providers and they do not give any medical advice or replace the care provided by health care providers.

The workshops run for six consecutive weeks, and each workshop is approximately 2.5 hours in length, each focusing on different topics related to living well with health problems, such as dealing with pain and fatigue, managing stress, making healthier food choices and gently increasing activities.

For more information about the program, visit www.takecontroltakecharge.ca or call Stella Muia at 905-521-2100 ext. 77153. Clinicians are encouraged to share information about the Take Charge! program with their patients, when appropriate.

Submitted by: Susan Anderson, self-management project coordinator at Chedoke Hospital