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Cancer Fighter

By Angela Blackburn - Oakville Beaver Staff
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Oakville's Dr. Dan Dumont is among the elite of scientific minds in Canada.

He researches cancer -- and has cancer himself.

The cruelty of being afflicted with the same disease one is studying is not new.

Dumont in fact knew -- his lab was across the hall from -- William E. Rawls, a researcher who also had cancer and in whose name the Canadian Cancer Society hands out an annual research prize.

In 2003, Dumont was awarded that prize -- \$1,000 for the recipient and \$20,000 for their research -- to a young researcher whose work has led to important advances in cancer control within the past decade.

Dumont, 46, a father of two children aged eight and 10, heads up The Dumont Lab at Toronto's Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre.

He is also Sunnybrook's director of Molecular and Cellular Biology. He is head of The Centre for Proteomic Studies at Sunnybrook Research Institute. He is a Canada Research Chair in Angiogenic and Lymphangiogenic Signaling and, he is a professor with the Department of Medical Biophysics at the University of Toronto.

He received the William E. Rawls prize for the identification and characterization of several angiogenic receptors including Tek/Tie2, Tie1, flk 1/VEGFR2, Endoglin and flt4/VEGFR3.

In layman's terms, Dumont said tumors need nourishment to grow and appear able to induce blood vessels to grow toward them in order to obtain that nourishment.

Dumont identified a group of molecules found in blood vessels that play a role in that process and that identification set the stage for further research.

Three years prior to the award however, Dumont was named a Canada Research Chair.

The federal program is at the heart of a national strategy to make Canada one of the world's top five countries for research and development.

In 2000, the government of Canada embarked on a goal to establish 2,000 research professorships - chairs - in universities across the country by 2008.

The program invests \$300 million a year to attract and retain some of the world's most accomplished and promising minds.

Dumont was, and continues to be, one of them and admits it's "a feather in your cap."

An Oakville resident since 1992, Dumont grew up in an army family, moving from place to place, with thoughts of becoming a veterinarian.

The polite, affable and quiet man who makes his home with his children and wife Anne, in River



Dr. Dan Dumont, Director of Molecular and Cellular Biology at Toronto's Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, is heading up a team in this year's Relay for Life at Appleby College in June. Not only is he an expert in cancer research, he is a cancer survivor.

- Photo by Derek Woollam

Oaks, is humble about his intellect.

"I've never had an IQ test," he said, noting, "My work is a trade, the same as anything else."

He said if he opened the hood of a Mercedes he wouldn't know the first thing about what's under it.

Born in Winnipeg to mom "Bunny," who makes her home in Montreal and dad, Don, who passed away when Dumont was 18, he has one sister, Lynne, a couple years younger than himself, who is a paramedic and lives in Kingston with her husband, who just returned from a tour of duty in Afghanistan.

"My dad was in the army, so we moved every two or three years. I was never any place I would call home," he said.

He attended high school in Kingston, then did his undergraduate studies at Concordia University in Montreal. It was the beginning of 13 years of university study to be followed by five years in a fellowship position.

"Originally I wanted to be a vet," he said, noting he happened into his career because "things just played out that way" after he landed a job as a lab technician early in his university career.

After earning a Bachelor of Science degree, he did his Masters.

He attended McMaster University to earn his PhD studying microbiology and virology.

Dumont did his post doctoral fellowship at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto and worked at Princess Margaret's AMGEM Oncology Institute.

Though Dumont was offered fellowship positions as far away as California, he chose to remain in Toronto where his wife worked.

Dumont and Anne -- a banker -- married nearly 20 years ago.

Again Dumont sighs that he's glad his wife is in banking, "I have no aptitude for that," he said.

He does have an aptitude in research and leads a team of researchers, who he credits as bright, dedicated people without whom he wouldn't have a research lab.

In a life that seems like a textbook success story, Dumont admits his diagnosis of having lymphoma in 1996 came as a shock.

"It was the year my son was born," he said.

His son Christopher is now 10. His daughter, Jennifer, is eight.

Dumont explains his lymphoma has been characterized as "not very aggressive," "low grade" or "indolent."

"It's one of these types of cancer that you just sit and wait and watch," he said.

Then, just short of his son's tenth birthday, Dumont was examined for having Celiac disease.

It's a digestive disease that damages the small intestine and interferes with absorption of nutrients from food. People with celiac disease cannot tolerate a protein called gluten, found in wheat, rye, and barley. Gluten is found mainly in foods, but may also be found in products such as stamp and envelope adhesive, medicines, and vitamins.

Celiac disease damages the small intestine and can lead to malnourishment no matter how much a person eats.

Dumont lost 40 pounds before being diagnosed with Celiac disease. During the course of that investigation, he was also diagnosed with colon cancer.

Dumont said he didn't get involved with cancer research to find a cure for himself.

"I was doing the cancer thing for quite some time," he said, before being diagnosed with the disease himself.

Though he admits it was "kind of odd" for him, he said his own diagnosis probably hasn't impacted his work or changed his direction very much.

It has increased his understanding of cancer from a personal perspective and his intimate relationship in the field has proved both good and bad.

"Understanding it more than the average layperson is sometimes a double-edged sword," said Dumont.

Though his involvement has been in research to date, Dumont said he decided this year to get more involved in the fundraising and awareness aspect of cancer.

To that end, he has rounded up some hockey dads - he coaches hockey with his son's team in addition to playing in his own men's league -- including Ron Martin, Brian Metler and Dean Newton -- to form a team to participate in the Oakville Relay for Life on June 1 at Appleby College.

The relay sees teams walk or run around the Appleby track in an overnight event led by a victory lap walked by survivors to raise funds for cancer research.

"This is my first year to participate," said Dumont who admitted he is "hitting up all his colleagues" for pledges.

To sponsor Dumont in the upcoming Relay for Life visit www.cancer.ca/relayforlife. To participate or form a team contact the Canadian Cancer Society, Oakville Unit at 905-845-5231, visit the unit at 635 Fourth Line, Unit 51 or visit www.cancer.ca/relay.

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