



Canadian Women's Heart Health Alliance Advocacy Working Group | Member Profile



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Woman with Lived Experience
Ottawa, ON
Alliance member since 2021

Biography

I have always loved skating on the Rideau Canal. In February, 2019, I noticed one of my skates was tighter than usual. Not thinking much of it, I was excited to go skating for the first time of the year. I did not make it too far without having to need a rest. I chalked it up as being a bit rusty and tired from the prior busy year of moving and downsizing. As the days progressed, I became increasingly fatigued and unable to sleep, waking up many times sweating and unable to return to sleep. I had unfortunately delayed my annual checkups for a few years dealing with many family crises. The fatigue had progressed so rapidly that I could not have a shower without being very short of breath, I could not carry my purse twenty feet to the elevator every morning as I left for work. My sleep became non-existent, the shortness of breath became the norm, and my fatigue debilitating. Still, I neglected my well-being and believed my symptoms were menopausal, and the lack of sleep caused my fatigue. Finally, when it was unbearable, I was able to see my wonderful family doctor for a quick visit without an appointment, and presented to her my explanation that I needed to sleep to feel better with these "menopausal" symptoms. She reluctantly prescribed a sleep aid for a short term to see if it would help, she filled a requisition for blood work, but insisted that I see her the following week to review my bloodwork. The sleep aid made no difference, and I never made it to that appointment.

Within six weeks from the day my skate felt too tight, one Friday in late March, 2019 at work, I was not able to even walk two feet without sitting to rest. This was not normal. I went to the emergency at the Ottawa Hospital, Civic Campus, and spent the next three weeks at the Ottawa Heart Institute with a diagnosis of heart failure. My heart function had gone down to 10 -150/o. I was 56 years old.

Today, I am extremely grateful for many things. My heart function has recovered because of the treatment I received and continue to receive. I am grateful for the expert care of all the health care professionals that saved my life and continue in my care, in my monitoring of my medication and my quality of life. I am grateful for the many programs and resources including cardiac rehabilitation and the Women@Heart Program. I am grateful for all the knowledge I have gained and continue to learn about women's heart health through the Canadian Women's Heart Health Alliance.

Today, I remind myself each and every day how important it is to take care of one self in order to be able to do what we all do is to take care of others, and I remind myself I am not alone.