

PART SEVEN OF SEVEN

CANCER

A CODE RED PROJECT



JOHN RENNISON, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Janice McFadyen enjoying a breakfast of french toast — 'I eat it every day' — at the hospice. She aims for 'the end of the day and pray to God this isn't the day.'

Lucky continued from // BA11

STEVE RUDANIECKI is one of 13 patients enrolled in the chronic lymphocytic leukemia clinical trial at the Juravinski, and "13 is my lucky number," he said.

He started his first round of experimental treatment in early July and he's had three further rounds of chemotherapy since then.

The results have been, well, almost beyond belief.

The swollen lumps and bumps protruding from his body that made him look like "the elephant man" — his words — have disappeared. His doctor told him there's virtually no sign of any remaining tumours and his blood counts are back very close to normal.

"This has taken a big load off of us," Rudaniecki said. "If this works, then people with my type of leukemia have something to look forward to."

"I waited 10 years for this opportunity and this hope."

By the same token, 10 years have also taught him to be cautious. Past treatments that seemed promising petered out when his body became resistant to the chemicals.

"The cancer's always on your mind," he said. "This could last three months and work great and then all of a sudden my body says 'I've had enough, I'm not going to chase this down.'"

"It's something that I've got to live with and hope for the best."

For now, though, he said it's like getting a last-minute call from the governor to be taken off death row. When he started the clinical trial in July, he was down to his last few months.

"If they start using the 'R' word with me — remission — then I'll be ecstatic," Rudaniecki said. "I'll let the whole world know about this."

Forget the 'R' word, said his wife, Susi. She's prepared to use the 'M' word.

"I call it a miracle," she said.

"We'll make another anniversary, another birthday. So many things that are happening this year that may not have happened."

"I pray every day that this is a cure."

AT THE BEGINNING of August, Janice McFadyen was given five weeks to live.

The breast cancer she beat once had returned and spread to her liver, lungs and bones. With no treatment options left, the 45-year-old had moved into the Dr. Bob Kemp Hospice on Stone Church Road East.

Now it's Oct. 22, a crisp, cool day under a brilliant sky.

Steve Rudaniecki has made it this far. So has Bill McArthur.

But you've been worried about Janice, haven't you?

"I'm still here," she says with a warm smile when I poke my head in her room.

The average length of stay for

a patient at the hospice is 16 days. Janice has made it to 71 days.

The five weeks she had left have been stretched to 12 and counting.

"I thought I'd be gone by now," she says, as she works her way one by one through the six pills she takes every morning to combat pain, epilepsy, anxiety and breathing problems. At night, she takes another six pills.

"I'm not sure what's pulled me through," she adds.

"Maybe all my dad's prayers. Maybe my strong will." She laughs.

She's waiting for her dad,

Ron Shaw, to arrive from his home in Midland.

He moved up there 13 years ago and now he's routinely making the six-hour round-trip drive to the hospice to be with his daughter, leaving early in the morning and returning late in the evening.

She has a small army of family and friends who have been keeping her company at the hospice. Daughter Rachel is by her side daily and son Dylan, in his first year at Brock University, visits when he can.

But there are still times when she's on her own, and we are never so alone as when we are alone with our fears.

Those are the worst times, she admits. It's hard to keep the mind from racing.

"Are you afraid?" I ask.

"Oh yeah," she answered. "I'm afraid of suffering."

"But my kids are amazing to have here with me. I love to tell them how proud of them I am and how sweet they are and how special they are."

"How long can you keep going?" I ask.

"I don't know," she says quietly. "Just get to the end of the day and pray to God this isn't the day."

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PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE REGULARLY USING WALK-IN CLINICS FOR HEALTH CARE BY FSA*

