

NEWS AND VIEWS

The Potential of a Unity in Community

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The HeartLand Tour (HLT) is a public awareness campaign that is directed at the community level, but celebrated at the provincial level. The “tag line” used is “Unity in Community.” The primary goal is to educate Nova Scotians about the excess burden of risk for cardiovascular disease that exists in our province (and cancer for that matter). The ultimate academic goal of the HLT is to promote development of well-designed prevention programs in the major communities where they should be throughout the province. Furthermore, the HLT strives to promote nutritional and physical activity change in the general population in an effort to alter the unfortunate trajectory of our youth and young adult population. In 2012, the HLT will begin a measurable strategy to this effect referred to as “The Heartland Heroes Family Program.” Keep an eye on the website (www.HeartLandTour.ca) and in the media for details.

The HLT began in 2007 with about 20 cyclists made up of cardiologists, surgeons, family practitioners, nurses, other allied health professionals, and patients. They cycled from Yarmouth to Sydney over seven days in July. Seeking public feedback on the utility of this kind of event led to positive change, with greater focus on individual communities and an expansion of the tour to eight communities over eight days. As a result of growth, a nonprofit society (The Cardiac Cycle Society of Nova Scotia – CCSNS) was developed to administer the HLT and is made up of community leaders and those with a passion for change. The HeartLand Tour **IS NOT** a fundraiser. It is an awareness raiser and change vehicle. It depends on the generosity and similar vision of sponsors both financially and in-kind. Taking all sponsorship into account, the HLT price is approximately 90 thousand dollars per year to execute across the province. However, there is a clear win-win



Figure 1. The HeartLand Tour core team 2011.

scenario for everyone involved; most importantly, Nova Scotians!

Progressive and deliberate evolution of the HLT each year has led to progressive partnerships in both public and private sectors that will allow both patient and provincially focused agendas to be achieved. Further, we strongly promote Dalhousie Medicine as the fundamental educational jewel for the Maritime Provinces regarding all practices of medicine and medical research.

Four medical students each year are part of the core team of the HLT and in this regard have an enjoyable and exciting week while promoting Dalhousie Medicine. Further partnership with the Medical School will lead to greater promotion of Dalhousie Medicine and its palpable presence in the communities throughout the province. From a research perspective, the HLT offers tremendous opportunity to do population health research regarding cardiovascular and other health risks throughout the province. In 2012, the first of these projects will begin with a second year medical student, Aniket Hooda, looking at cardiovascular risk factors and risk of developing of atrial fibrillation. Many research potentials lie within the constructs of the HLT, and hopefully this first project will begin that propagation.

Participation of the HLT has progressively increased over the years with nearly 2,000 participants in 2011. Part of the evolution of the HLT will look towards uniting common agendas of physical activity throughout the province and celebrating goal achievements in physical activities in each of the communities during the tour week. Thus, each community can celebrate its achievements in such areas as active transportation and physical activity programs at a provincial level.

An ultimate goal of the HLT would be the production of, what is referred to as, HeartSafe Community Partnerships. These would be communities that have made significant changes with respect to lifestyle and prevention, whereby a well designed prevention program exists in the community, the community has infrastructure to promote physical activity along with a strategy to grow it on an annual basis. Also, the community strongly supports high quality nutrition that may be demonstrated in its institutions that may exist in that community (hospitals, schools, long-term care facilities). There is clear desire by many passionate professionals throughout this province at all levels. A common construct such as the HLT can actually provide an avenue by which it will happen. Clearly,

HeartSafe communities advertised at a provincial level would be an attraction that would help change the image which Nova Scotia presently bears with respect to its excess burden of risk and disease...and hopefully its communities' survival. Who knows, it may be an attractive "vehicle" to drive across the country?!

The HLT 2012 starts July 7th in Wolfville. Check out the website (HeartLandTour.ca), where all participants need to register, and come join us for any or all of the community events. The finale is July 15th on the Halifax Commons. It's well worth it, especially since it's FREE and you may even get a sport T-Shirt for participating!