

A letter from Terry Hawrysh

They say change is the only constant in life. While change can mean the end of something meaningful, it is often a sign that something even greater has taken root.



When OICR's Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC) launched in 2021, it marked a significant change in how research was conceived, designed and carried out at OICR. Patients would no longer just be participants in research. They would be active partners, supporting funding, shaping research questions, improving recruitment practices, interpreting findings and disseminating knowledge.

Over the next five years, my PFAC colleagues and I advised OICR as it embedded patients across its research programs. Today, patients are helping shape research projects and guiding research strategy throughout the Institute. At the same time, the OICR Patient Community has grown from a handful of individuals to more than 140 patients, caregivers, and family members, ready to provide their expertise and experience.

By 2025-26, it became clear it was once again time for a change. With patient partnership well-established and a large, diverse and motivated Patient Community seeking more opportunity for engagement, it made sense to revisit our previous approach. We decided to evolve our model to enable our Patient Community to more effectively participate across all OICR research themes and programs, and believe this will result in more timely, customizable and impactful collaboration.

So while it was bittersweet to help design a model that will do away with the PFAC I've proudly sat on for five years, I have never been prouder to be out of a job. But as we bid farewell to PFAC, I want to take a moment to acknowledge some of the remarkable people who made it so successful.

Each and every member of PFAC, whether they were with us since the beginning or only served for a short time, left their mark on the Council and on patient partnership at OICR. We will never forget our brilliant colleague Emily McIntosh, a founding member of PFAC who we lost to brain cancer this past February. The same goes for Jill Hamer-Wilson, a founding PFAC member and tireless patient advocate who passed away in 2022 from lung cancer. My heartfelt thanks also goes to OICR Executive and OICR researchers and staff for working alongside us to learn new ways of doing things.

It may be the end of the PFAC era, but I have confidence that the next era will take what we've built to new heights. The incredible Patient Community, of which I'm proud to call myself a member, is ready to carry this work forward with energy, insight and purpose.

We were brought together by the desire for change. We all want to make research stronger and help people affected by cancer live better. Together we have built a foundation for patient partnership that stretches from one end of the province to the other, and I can't wait to see what changes next.

Terry Hawrysh

Member, OICR Patient Community

Founding Member and Chair (2024-2026), OICR Patient and Family Advisory Council