

## Nadia Gale - Artist in the laboratory

September 1, 2011

### The Report: September 2011 vol.32 num.3

NADIA GALE AND HER COLLEAGUES SEE THE PERSON BEHIND THE TISSUE SAMPLE

**WHEN LABORATORY TECHNOLOGIST** Nadia Gale heard shed won the Medical Technologist/ Technician Award for Continued Professional Development, conferred by the Canadian Association of Pathologists this spring, she was of course thrilled ... not just for herself, but for all laboratory technologists.

-I was really pleased that our profession was getting some higher-level recognition. There are some awesome lab techs in the lower mainland and this sent the message that we are doing a great job," says Gale.

-And I was especially honoured that the award came from the Canadian Association of Pathologists. That's who we work for. Our job is to make their lives easier so they can make timely and accurate diagnoses."

Gale is the histopathology section head at BC Cancer Agency. The job offers plenty of variety: her responsibilities include scheduling, ordering, budgeting, supervising, hiring, regular statistical analysis, monthly quality reports, and plenty of hands-on work in the lab, helping when things are busy, and filling in on sick and vacation days.

-As well, I'm pretty involved in quality control and maintaining continuous quality improvement," she says.

Histopathology, sometimes called histology or anatomical pathology, deals with tissues, as opposed to hematology which works with blood. Gale's department is responsible for processing tissues (collected through biopsies) so that the pathologist can examine them in order to make diagnoses and decide treatment. Speed and accuracy are crucial.

One of the challenges of the job, says Gale, is maintaining a sense of contact with the patient. She and her colleagues are in fact two steps removed from the patients ... they work with the pathologist, who then works with the clinician, who interacts with the patient.

-We try to treat every sample as if it were a family member's sample. We ask ourselves how we would treat this if it were our mother, husband or son.

-In health care we hear a lot about not getting too emotionally involved but in our case it's the opposite. We need to get more personally involved because we never see a face, as compared to people who see patients day after day all day. So we imagine the face, the person and their life, and the stress they must be going through," she says.

To explain why she went into histology, Gale, rather paradoxically, explains that back in high school she was more interested in arts than science: -In high school I thought I'd end up being a writer."

She excelled in English, but when she graduated she chose to go into science, mainly because it offered more career options. After completing her first year of a BSc program at University of Waterloo she recognized that

she loved lab work and switched to the BCIT medical laboratory technologist program, where she quickly realized that histology was her favourite part of lab work.

-Histology appeals to the more artistic side of me. Its very hands on, we stain the microscopic tissue sections and some are quite beautiful. You have a product at the end of the day, something you can look at and feel proud of." says Gale.

As section head, another thing she can be proud of is continuous improvement in her teams work. To make this happen, she needs to keep learning, and keep integrating what she has learned into her workplace. Her success in these endeavours is what garnered her the award from the Canadian Association of Pathologists.

-I took a couple of different courses in 2010. One of them was called the Foundational Health Care Leadership Program, offered by the Provincial Health Services Authority to provide extra education to front line leaders," she says. She also studied to become a certified -Lean" leader (Lean is a management style intended to lead to greater efficiency).

As a result of what Gale learned, she led a series of Rapid Process Improvement Workshop events at her workplace. These led to small but significant changes that improved her sections performance.

-For instance, one thing we did was stagger our working shifts, and had two technologists come in at earlier times in the day. This small change helped the work flow so we could get results out to the pathologist the same day rather than having it take overnight," she explains. This, and other small steps, created a synergistic effect which led to -huge increases in work efficiency," she says.

Gales passion for her work, and her leadership abilities, are also reflected in what she chooses to do in her free time: for three years, she has been a team captain for the BC Ride to Conquer Cancer. This involves organizing a team of about 30 cyclists who join close to 2900 others for a 250 km ride from Vancouver to Seattle, over two days on Fathers Day weekend.

The ride is a fundraiser for cancer research. Last year her team, called Team OvCaRe, raised \$76,809, which they channeled specifically toward ovarian cancer research. The BC ride raised \$11.1 million altogether in 2011, contributing to the Canadian total of \$43.9 million, making this the largest cycling fundraiser in the country.

Gale is already looking forward to the 2012 ride.

-Its really amazing when there are so many likeminded people together, all doing something challenging, for someone else. By doing the ride, Ive met some amazing people I would never have known otherwise. I love the stories, the friendships, and the inspiration I get from those people.

-Everyone has been touched by cancer. It feels good to be able to make a difference," she says.

The ability to contribute is exactly what she loves most about her work.

-The best thing about it is feeling that I have a positive impact on patient care in the province, even though Im behind the scenes," she says. Its especially nice when this impact gets recognized by a national medical association. 

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