

## Case of Mary Avaalaaquiaq

Mrs. Mary Avaalaaquiaq is an 81-year-old Inuit woman who lives in the remote northern community of Pond Inlet, Baffin Island (population = 500). Her home is a crowded two bedroom bungalow in which several of her five children and six grandchildren reside. She does not speak or understand English very well and requires a translator when meeting with health care professionals.

### **Medical Information**

Mrs. Avaalaaquiaq was taken by her eldest daughter to see the resident nurse practitioner because she was experiencing shortness of breath, upper bilateral chest pain, and difficulty swallowing solids and semi-solids (but not liquids). The nurse examined Mrs. Avaalaaquiaq and determined that the elder needed to be examined more thoroughly by the consulting family physician who would be in Pond Inlet within the next 10 days. Diagnostic testing by the family physician led to the decision to send Mrs. Avaalaaquiaq to a cancer treatment centre in Montreal.

The oncology team in Montreal conducted a thorough assessment of Mrs. Avaalaaquiaq. They diagnosed advanced cancerous lesions in both of her lungs and a secondary metastasis in her larynx. Mrs. Avaalaaquiaq successfully underwent an emergency laryngectomy because her airway system was being compromised by the laryngeal tumor. Mrs. Avaalaaquiaq also underwent a short course of chemo and radiotherapies to help ease her chest pain. Long-term therapies were not recommended or implemented. The prognosis for Mrs. Avaalaaquiaq was poor. This was discussed with her and her daughter, along with several care options.

### **Presenting Problem**

Mrs. Avaalaaquiaq was given the choice of staying in Montreal to receive palliative care or returning to her community. She was told she had 3-6 months to live; medical intervention was no longer appropriate.

*Adapted from Case Studies in Gerontology for the Applied Health Sciences: An Education Resource developed by J.B. Orange, S. Hobson, M.F. Cheeseman, A.A. Vandervoot, and M.E. Black, July, 1997.*