

IPHER

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**Interprofessional Health  
Education and Research**

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**The Case of Virginia Snow**

Virginia Snow is a 45-year old single mother. She has been divorced for 8 years and has an 11-year old daughter, Ashley. Her ex-husband lives in London and works intermittently. He rarely sees Ashley and provides only occasional financial support. Virginia's mother died of breast cancer 13 years ago and she has no other supports aside from a neighbour who comes over for a coffee or glass of wine a few times each week.

Virginia had arthroscopic surgery on her right knee due to a tear in the cartilage in 1998. 2 years later she became very depressed after suffering a back injury acquired at work. She acquired the injury while transferring an obese patient. She was then on sick leave for the next 2 years. But after this time, the Workers' Safety Insurance Board (WSIB) assessed her and determined that she was able to return to work. When she tried to return she found her back pain unrelenting and she finally was forced to quit her job as a personal care worker.

Virginia was not able to find any work she could do that did not exacerbate her back pain. This caused her to become more depressed. Her family physician put her on Naproxen for her back pain but this in turn caused acid reflux syndrome. She was then taken off the Naproxen and now takes Norflex for the pain and Tylenol #3 as needed. She takes Pantoloc for the acid reflex. She is also on Monpril for high blood pressure partly as a result of weight gain due to her reduced activity and her inability to lift more than 5 kilos.

After the birth of her daughter in 1996, both she and the baby almost died due to Hemolysis, Elevated Liver Enzymes, and Low Blood

Platelets (HELLP) Syndrome at the time of her delivery. Her daughter was born 5-weeks premature but she does not appear to have any ill effects from her prematurity and continues to meet normal growth and development parameters.

Virginia is experiencing more difficulty getting up in the mornings. She is also sleeping longer into the day. Her daughter must get herself up, fed, lunch made, and to school most days on her own. Virginia feels guilty about not being a “good mother” but just does not seem to be able to pull herself together. Lately she has returned to smoking and consumes about 1 pack of cigarettes a day. She also has been drinking about 3-4 glasses of wine a day. She believes this helps to control her pain and makes her feel better.

She and her daughter live in a subsidized 2-storey London Housing Unit. She is able to meet her rental payments with her Ontario Works (welfare) income to stay in this unit but worries whether she can continue to manage the stairs much longer. Lately she has begun sleeping on the downstairs living room sofa. She has heard that to move to an apartment that has elevators would present an unsafe environment for her daughter because of youth bullying and drug abuse. These worries are adding to her depression.

Recently Virginia took her daughter out to ice-skate on a local frozen pond. But on her way back Virginia slipped on ice and fell onto her buttocks. This caused a sharp pain in her back that is still present. She has increased her meds, Tylenol and alcohol consumption to try and control the pain without benefit. She is seeking immediate help to deal with her pain and arrives at the Family Health clinic in her housing complex (a much easier alternative to the 45 minute bus ride to her family doctor’s office).