

## **New Education and Exercise Program: Taking a *LEEP* Towards Healthy Choices and Recovery**

**Markham, ON, September 27, 2011** – Last month, the first graduates of Markham Stouffville Hospital's innovative Lifestyle Education and Exercise Program (LEEP) proudly accepted their certificates of completion. For Ruth LeBlanc, the journey to graduation day began early this year when she was referred to the program through Markham Stouffville Hospital's Stroke Clinic after suffering from a mini stroke.

Traumatized by this warning sign and determined to do what she could to improve her lifestyle, LeBlanc signed up for the program without hesitation. "Any help, any learning, anything at all – I was open to it. I intend to live a long and full life," she says.

The LEEP program at Markham Stouffville Hospital promotes overall wellness in patients with confirmed cerebral vascular disease, including those who have had a stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA), as well as individuals with risk factors including high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, increased stress levels, inactive lifestyles as well as smokers.

Attending just one day per week for six months, participants in the program can improve their fitness and overall well being, as well as their blood pressure, blood sugar control and cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

"I noticed a change within a month – I started feeling better," says LeBlanc, whose family and friends could hardly believe the dramatic change in her lifestyle. Now, no longer taking insulin to control her blood sugar levels, LeBlanc works to maintain her healthy diet and exercises regularly, thanks to education and encouragement she received through the LEEP program.

"Each week during education sessions, our team of nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists, and dieticians, focus on a different topic such as stress management or healthy eating, providing our participants with the knowledge they need to make healthy choices," says Elaine Goulbourne, Director, Surgical Services, Markham Stouffville Hospital.

"The program emphasizes self management principles in attaining a healthy lifestyle by assisting participants in setting weekly goals and developing action plans such as reducing salt intake and regularly checking their blood pressure," says Beatrice Edelstein, Clinical Manager, Rehabilitation Services and Orthopaedic Clinics, Markham Stouffville Hospital.

In addition, the program includes weekly exercise session where participants follow their individualized exercise prescription in a supportive environment helping them become more active both during the sessions and at home. "By moving this body, I make this body better," says LeBlanc, who previously referred to herself as a "couch potato" and now makes time for physical activity every day.

# Media Release

“This program really supports the hospital’s belief that our role is to help our community members maximize their health,” explains Julia Scott, Vice President, Clinical Programs and Chief Nursing Executive at Markham Stouffville Hospital. “This program is preventative as much as it is rehabilitative, with the focus on providing the skills participants need to stay healthy and avoid serious medical conditions and hospitalization.”

For LeBlanc, making healthy choices continues to be a daily choice, but she and other participants in the program have formed a strong bond and continue to meet and check in with one another, supporting each other along the way.

“You get out as much as you put in. They give you the tools and support you,” she says. “It changed everything for me.”

Any community members interested in participating in the LEEP program can contact 905-472-7379 for more information.

**Markham Stouffville Hospital Corporation (MSHC)** is a progressive two-site, community hospital with leading diagnostic services and clinical programs in acute care medicine and surgery, mental health, and maternal and child health; all focused on the needs of our rapidly growing communities. Partnering with other specialist providers, the 330 physicians and 1,800 staff of the Corporation make it the centre of community care for the residents of Markham, Stouffville and Uxbridge – a catchment area of over 300,000 members.

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