Focus on Faculty #5
Robin Cohen

Dr. Robin Cohen is a Professor in the McGill Departments of Oncology and Medicine and a Staff Investigator at the Lady Davis Institute, Jewish General Hospital. She is also an Associate Member of McGill's Ingram School of Nursing and the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology. Dr. Cohen is a long-time McGillian. She obtained her Ph.D. in Psychology (Experimental) at McGill in 1986, the year her twins Ari and Jordan were born. Her thesis and her postdoctoral fellowship at the US National Institute on Drug Abuse focused on the neuroanatomy of pain and analgesia. Following postdoctoral training she spent four years at home raising her children. Her subsequent decision to switch from animal to human research prompted her to begin postdoctoral studies in the Oncology Department's Program in Palliative Care in 1992. In 1996 she became an Assistant Professor in the Department as well as Research Director of the Program, a position which she still holds.

Dr. Cohen has played a leading role in developing outcome measures for palliative care research which are internationally acknowledged as being among the best in the field [McGill Quality of Life Questionnaire (MQOL) and Quality of Life in Life-Threatening Illness-Family caregiver version (QOLLTI-F)]. She has helped develop palliative care research in Canada through leading the CIHR/NCIC Strategic Training Initiative in Health Research (STIHR) in Palliative Care and the NCIC Sociobehavioural Cancer Research Network Palliative Care Team, and co-leading the CIHR New Emerging Team in Family Caregiving in Palliative and End of Life Care, among other activities. Through her work on the Executive Committee of the International Congress on Palliative Care since 2005, she has ensured the growing prominence of research in the presentations, educating many Quebecers, Canadians, and a broad international audience about the role research can play in improving care.

Dr. Cohen has focused her research on optimizing the quality of life of people at the end of life and that of their family caregivers. Her research has highlighted the importance of existential well-being in people with advanced life-limiting illness. With her former trainees Drs. Virginia Lee, Melissa Henry, and Christopher MacKinnon, she has developed and tested interventions to help advanced cancer patients and people who are recently bereaved to establish a renewed sense of purpose and meaning in life. Her trainees are also developing, implementing, and testing 1) a physical activity intervention to maintain family caregiver mental and physical health (Jamie Penner) and a program to enable acute care nurses to provide a palliative approach to advanced heart failure patients (Esther Laforest). She has also conducted research in pediatric palliative care. Her most recent project is a participatory approach to implement and formatively evaluate an evidence-based volunteer Caregiver Coach service whose goal is to empower family caregivers of palliative care patients at home to maintain their own wellbeing and provide care. The next step is to engage a broader community in creating and sustaining a volunteer-led Caregiver Coach service. Dr. Cohen encourages anyone interested in helping with this next step to contact her.

Dr. Cohen enjoys spending time in the Laurentians with her family.

We asked Dr. Cohen to list a few of her articles whose work she is particularly proud of or enjoyed the most. This is what she provided:

Cohen SR, Mount BM. Living with cancer: "Good" days and "bad" days - What produces them? Can the McGill Quality of Life Questionnaire distinguish between them? *Cancer. 2000 Oct 15; 89(8)*: 1854-1865.

Mehta A, **Cohen SR**, Ezer F, Carnevale F, Ducharme F. Family caregivers of palliative cancer patients at home: The puzzle of pain management. *J Palliat Care. 2010 Autumn; 26(3)*: 184-93. PMID: 20718392

Kogan NR, Dumas M, **Cohen SR**. The extra burdens patients in denial impose on their family caregivers. *J Palliat Supp Care. 2013 Apr; 11(2)*:91-99.