

■ HEMOCHROMATOSIS

Learning how to stop the bronze killer

Talk Monday will discuss little-known metabolic, but potentially fatal, problem

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The right amount of iron in the body is a good thing. Too much, and the scenario can potentially turn deadly. What is hemochromatosis?

Canadian Hemochromatosis Society executive director Bob Rogers will be in Prince George July 9 to talk about the country's most common genetic disorder hereditary hemochromatosis (HHC.) This potentially fatal condition is actually caused by a defect of iron metabolism and can lead to iron overload in vital organs, joints and tissues.

The good news is, says Rogers, that the complications caused by HHC are preventable if a diagnosis is made before the excess iron causes irreversible damage. The bad news is, that while hemochromatosis is common, the tests to detect it are not widely performed.

"There are simple blood tests, serum transferrin (SF) or transferrin saturation (TS) that can be done to screen people for the disorder. These tests are not part of a general medical checkup, they have to be specifically ordered on a blood lab requisition form. We've been lobbying for years to get more tests done early to detect the problem."

DNA testing can confirm the presence of the three mutations known to cause hemochromatosis, he said.

Rogers has been with the Canadian Hemochromatosis Society, a non-profit society, for five years. He believes strongly in the work that they do to raise awareness about the disorder.

"My job is to get the word out about hemochromatosis," Rogers said on Thursday from Lillooet, one of the stops for his power point presentation. "I'm 61 now and for the next years until my retirement I want to give back by helping people understand what we know about hemochromatosis. How prevalent is it? According to an

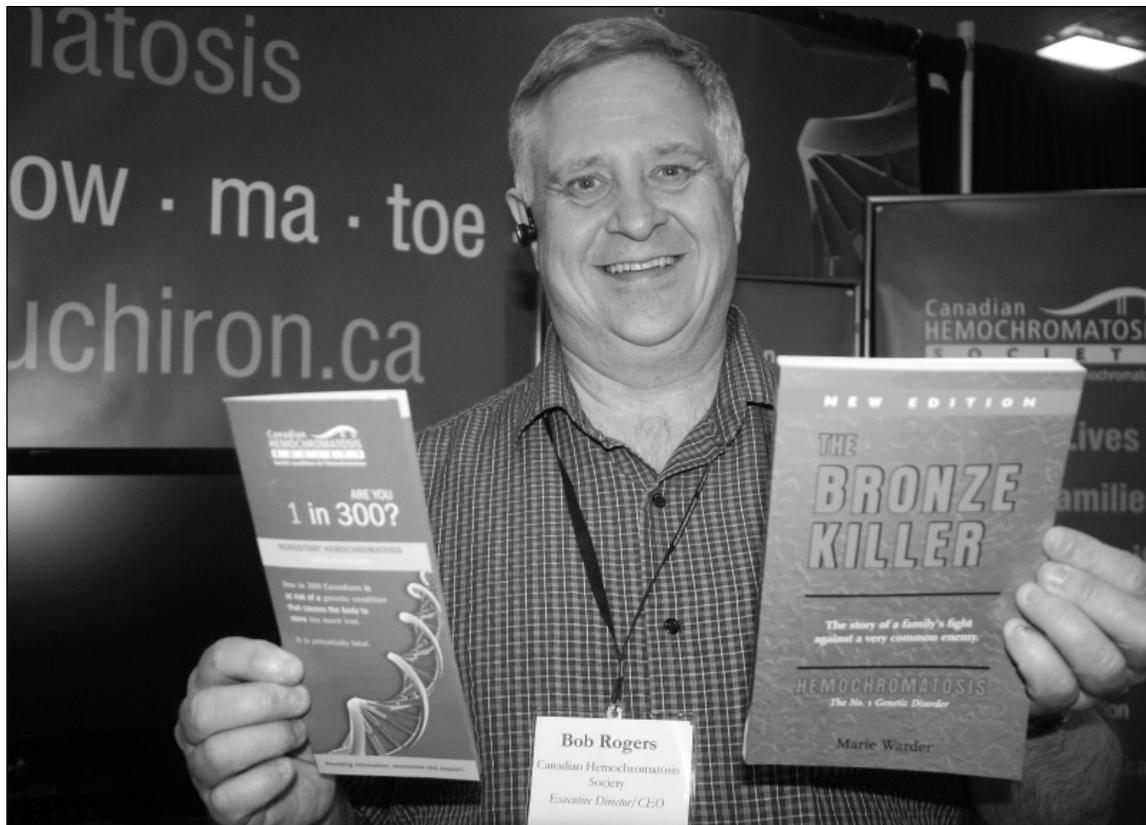
HEIRS study, 1 in 300 in the general population are affected. If we can find one person with hemochromatosis [through testing] then maybe we save their entire family."

Indeed, by the end of his "talking tour" on July 20, Rogers will have visited several northern B.C. towns including Quesnel, Williams Lake, Prince George and Burns Lake. Frank Berto, event coordinator for the society, says their office has received "quite a few queries" about hemochromatosis from people living in the North.

In his presentation, Rogers traces the history and possible origins of the disease which dates back to 1,000 years ago when the Celts were invading northern Europe.

The Canadian Hemochromatosis Society was established to create awareness about this not well understood but common disorder so that early diagnosis would become the rule rather than the exception. The society provides information and support to those adversely affected by iron overload.

Canadian Hemochromatosis Society executive director Bob Rogers will be speaking at the Prince George Civic Centre, Room 203, on Monday, July 9 at an informational seminar on the treatment and management of hemochromatosis.



Bob Rogers of the Canadian Hemochromatosis Society at the Prince George Home Show in April. Free Press file photo

Rogers will also provide updates on the activities of the society. This free event

starts and 7 p.m. and is open to the pub-

lic. For more information about hemochro-

matosis visit www.toomuchiron.ca.

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