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Leslee Thompson is Provincial Vice-President, Cancer System integration and Performance at Cancer Care Ontario (CCO), and Chair of CCO's Provincial Leadership Council. She has almost 20 years of progressive healthcare leadership experience that includes senior executive positions in two

provinces leading major restructuring initiatives and mergers.

Her experience has crossed community hospitals, multi-site academic centres, a large regional health authority, provincial cancer agencies and government. She also serves as a Director on the Board of Shoppers Drug Mart Corporation.

I joined Cancer Care Ontario in January 2003, with a mandate to drive a province-wide integration process to conclusion by the end of the calendar year. Difficult, yes – but also exciting, challenging and rewarding.

The goal of integration was simple: to improve the quality of care for cancer patients across Ontario. The challenge was to integrate 11 regional cancer centres into their host hospitals, and set the stage for future improvements to the provincial cancer system.

Timelines, teamwork and transparency were three key reasons for success.

Ironically, these were also the factors that made the change process most challenging. When we set deadlines, we stuck to them, even in the midst of SARS, operational pressures and a provincial election. There were many opportunities for this to go off-track but we remained focused, worked efficiently and didn't strive for perfection. Tight timelines helped build momentum and motivation, and forced us to be creative in how we approached our various tasks.

The CEOs collectively steered the process, with support from a few senior people assigned to "get the job done." Hundreds of others were engaged through local and provincial work groups that would start up and stop as required. Decision-making and communication was also streamlined. The type of change required CCO to work closely with the government, keeping them informed and involved along the way. In turn, this led to the government giving us full support and the authority we required to keep moving forward.

Not surprisingly, a number of complications arose along the way. We dealt with these in a timely and transparent fashion, then just kept going. In the end, it was hard work and mutual trust among the key leaders that helped us reach our goals. Now that changes in structure and accountability are complete, CCO is at the end of a new beginning. Working together, we will now turn our attention to creating the best cancer system in the world.



**Dora Nicinski, RN, BSN,**  
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Dora Nicinski is the President and CEO of Atlantic Health Sciences Corporation (AHSC). Prior to joining AHSC, Ms. Nicinski was the CEO of the North Okanagan Health Region in Vernon, BC. A registered nurse and career health professional, she has over 16 years of experience as

a hospital administrator and healthcare consultant in British Columbia. She has managed hospitals in several B.C. communities and oversaw the establishment of the province's first regional health authority.

Developing organizational structure within the context of regionalized health services adds a further dimension of complexity to already complex organizations. Geographic areas of responsibility that take days to travel, along with a shift to region-wide program management, provide two disparate arguments for choice of organizational structure.

There is one inclination to ground an organization in region wide program management because of best practice, shared skills and rationalization of resources. There is another inclination to ground an organization in geographic entities because of distinct communities, existing cultural identities and political pressure to retain the independence of the service.

Having worked with three regional health authorities, I have had ample opportunity to test different approaches to regional organizational structures. My conclusion from learning to date is that a matrix organizational structure which is grounded in strategic objectives and values is the best option. That means that organizational structure will evolve as the strengths and objectives of the organization evolve.

In order to succeed, fundamental requirements of successful matrix organizational structure in a program management and regional geographic environment are:

- Clarity of organizational strategic direction
- Demonstration of commitment to stated values
- Competence in leadership
- Clear delineation of areas of responsibility and accountability
- Monitoring of organizational accountability
- Respect for the unique culture of communities
- Effective partnerships with community organizations
- Excellent communication
- Flexibility in reconfiguration as experience teaches