



CRACKING CANCER

Why are Vancouver doctors giving diabetes and blood pressure medications to patients with incurable cancer? And why are the drugs working?

Watch the WORLD
PREMIERE of the
DREAMFILM
PRODUCTIONS
documentary
CRACKING CANCER

CBC's *The Nature of Things*
Thursday, February 23 at
8 p.m. (8:30 p.m. NL)

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Vancouver/Toronto: At age 33, Zuri Scrivens discovered she had breast cancer. She endured a mastectomy, radiation, chemo and hormone therapy. Within 9 months, Zuri's cancer was back - and had spread to her liver and lymph nodes. Her disease now considered incurable, she faced the very real prospect she'd never see her toddler grow up.

That was five years ago. Today, Zuri has no signs of cancer, not because of a miraculous new cancer drug, but thanks to a standard treatment for diabetes. Zuri Scrivens has become the poster child for a revolutionary approach to **CRACKING CANCER**.

It's called POG - Personalized OncoGenomics - and it's the subject of the gripping new documentary **CRACKING CANCER**, premiering on **Thursday, February 23 at 8pm/8:30 NL** on CBC's flagship science program *The Nature of Things*. With exclusive and rare access, **CRACKING CANCER** follows a group of patients, all with incurable cancer, through a highly experimental clinical trial at the BC Cancer Agency in Vancouver, a trial that holds the promise of personalized cancer diagnosis and treatment.

The trial compares patients' normal DNA – each cell's complete set of instructions – with that of their tumours, to find the genetic mutations causing their specific cancer. That means sequencing a patient's whole genome, including roughly 20,000 genes. Researchers sift through mountains of data for the point or points where things went haywire: a mutation or mutations. Then the hunt for an effective tool to tackle the cancer begins.

“We're trying to find what's driving that cancer,” says Dr. Janessa Laskin, who is co-founder of the trial. “And then, can we identify a drug that will block the cancer driver in each patient?” Zuri's cancer driver was a mutation that caused a very high growth factor. The POG team painstakingly plowed through decades' worth of scientific discovery, to isolate which drug in all of medicine, not just cancer, might block that growth factor. They zeroed in on a diabetes medication. Zuri received the drug, and continued standard hormone treatment. Within 5 months, her cancer became undetectable.

What makes **CRACKING CANCER** so compelling is the courage of the participants who allowed cameras to capture their most vulnerable moments. “We joined them on the rollercoaster ride that is cancer,” says director Judith Pyke. “With people like Zuri, we witness elation, while others confront crushing disappointment. It was a year of intimacy and honesty I will never forget.”

“The hope is the more patients you can bring into the program and test and compare, the better. My outcome has shown that anything is possible,” says a grateful Zuri. Her breathtaking recovery illustrates a radical new way of treating cancer, not according to where it originates in the body, but rather as a disease of genetic mutations.

Dr. Marco Marra, one of the world's leading genome scientists and co-founder of the POG trial, says, “What would you do with 100,000 fully characterized genomes where you knew how the cancers had behaved after being treated? I think you would have a resource that might actually revolutionize how we develop drugs.”

When POG launched in 2012, there were only 30 cancer patients in the trial. But initial results were so promising it has expanded to take in 750 patients to date. It's aiming to enrol 5,000. Considering an estimated 40 percent of all North Americans will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetimes, millions of us stand to benefit from the knowledge gleaned through POG. Thousands more will join the trial, all hoping for their own salvation, all helping science to crack the cancer code.

CRACKING CANCER is directed by Judith Pyke, written by Judith Pyke & Helen Slinger, and produced by Sue Ridout. The narrator and host is David Suzuki. Editor is Alan Flett; Director of Photography is Todd Craddock; Original Music composed by Ben Mink. For CBC: Executive in Charge of Production, Sue Dando; Executive Director Unscripted Content, Jennifer Dettman. The documentary is produced by Dreamfilm Productions in association with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and with the participation of the Canada Media Fund, the Rogers Documentary Fund, the Province of British Columbia - Film Incentive BC, and the Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit Program.

Dreamfilm Productions was established in 2001 by broadcast journalist Sue Ridout. Based in Vancouver, the Gemini Award-winning film production company specializes in thought-provoking, high-impact documentaries that tackle subject matter with both sensitivity and journalistic integrity. Dreamfilm has built an impressive roster of 18 award-winning documentaries that have been seen in over 125 countries. They include 5 previous documentaries for *The Nature of Things*, most recently *The Antibiotic Hunters*, winner of the prestigious Gold World Medal for Best Health & Medicine Documentary at the 2016 New York Festivals. Dreamfilm's productions are among the most-watched documentaries on cbc.ca. For more information, please go to: dreamfilm.ca, Twitter [@dreamfilm](https://twitter.com/dreamfilm), facebook.com/Dreamfilm.

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**Airing Thursday February 23, 2017 at 8 pm/8:30 pm NL
on CBC's *The Nature of Things***

Media Contact:

Andrew Poon, Publicist

E: vanfilmbuff@novuscom.net

T: 604-318-1882

the nature of things
WITH DAVID SUZUKI



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