



## North Shore News Column.

### Older & Wiser

By Tom Carney

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## Health care top of mind for Canadians

By Tom Carney, Special to North Shore News September 11, 2011

TODAY'S edition of the Older & Wiser column comes to you from Brantford, Ont.

My great-grandparents settled here in the 1800s and I still have family in the area.

Brantford is situated on the Grand River, about 100 kilometres west of Toronto. The prosperity of the 19th and 20th centuries is still evident here but this city, with a population of slightly less than 100,000, has been hard hit by the recession.

Brantford has a revitalization plan for the downtown core but right now block after block of what used to be the heart of the business and shopping district is boarded up and deserted.

The good news is that Wilfred Laurier University has established a satellite campus in Brantford and that has brought new life to the area. Some of the old heritage buildings are being restored to form the campus, students are taking advantage of the cheap rent in the area, and coffee shops, book stores and businesses that cater to the student crowd are popping up everywhere.

Brantford is still a long way from being prosperous but it's a start. Ontario faces a number of the same problems as B.C.: an aging population, increased demand for health care, rising unemployment, crumbling infrastructure and rising deficits. Ontario's problems are exacerbated by the fact that they have a much larger population than we do and much of the manufacturing industry, which has been a source of their prosperity for decades, is gone, probably forever. Ontarians will go to the polls this October and despite some stumbles from the ruling Liberal government the outcome of the election is anything but certain.

Now I'm here on holidays but I have been keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings of the annual Canadian Medical Association (CMA) conference in Newfoundland. The CMA has been engaged in a conversation with Canadians about ways to transform the health care system for the past three years. They found that while Canadians are certainly open and receptive to change, the vast majority are in favour of keeping a strong publicly funded health care system.

Survey after survey shows that the majority of Canadians have a concern about more private sector involvement in health care.

My visit here reminds me that there is another option and that is to have the public and private sector work together to create a better, more efficient system. This is quite different than a parallel private system. We could, for example, allow the private sector to bid on a limited number of publicly funded medical services.

In 2007, a private clinic in Toronto offered to do knee replacements at a cost that was approximately 20 per cent

less than community hospitals were charging at the time. The Government of Ontario turned them down flat. I'm not surprised. It was a safe decision - governments do want to get re-elected - but economically it doesn't make much sense.

Wait times for knee replacement surgery varies, but the average wait time in Ontario for this procedure is about 200 days.

Access to health care will, I suspect, be a dominant issue in the election in Ontario this fall. Heading into the election, there's lots of rhetoric but not much leadership coming from any of the political parties in Ontario on the health care file.

Politicians all say they have a plan to make the health care system more accessible but no one wants to talk about how we are going to pay for it.

I'm not sure which party will win the election but I am sure of this: in the short-term politics wins; in the long-term economics wins. Always. Just ask Greece.

Tom Carney is the co-ordinator of the Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. Ideas for future columns are welcome. Contact him at 604-985-3852 or send an email to [lions\\_view@telus.net](mailto:lions_view@telus.net).