



## North Shore News Column.

### Older & Wiser

By Tom Carney

## Important to use it or lose it

### Studies suggest a later retirement age delays the onset of dementia

By Tom Carney, North Shore News August 3, 2013

SOONER or later everyone retires.

The question isn't will you retire but when. In Canada most of us are answering that question with our feet.

Just six per cent of workers continue to work full time after age 65 and the average retirement age is 62.

For those of you who decide to hang in there, there is a silver lining. A new study of nearly half a million people in France found that retiring later can delay the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

The study found that for each additional year of work beyond the age of 65 the risk of getting dementia is reduced by 3.2 per cent.

Another study out of Britain with a much smaller sample size also found a significant correlation between later retirement age and later onset of dementia in men.

There could be a number of reasons why later retirement is linked with later onset of dementia.

Men who retire early often do so because of health conditions, such as hypertension or diabetes, which increase your risk of dementia.

It could also be that working helps keep your mind and body active, which may reduce risk of dementia.

Now the notion of "use it or lose it" makes sense to me but I think there is a flaw in these latest studies.

Working is not the only option for keeping mentally fit and active as we age. Years ago retirement may have been a daunting prospect for a lot of workers. Today we have embraced the notion of an active retirement where retirees remain cognitively and socially active and continue to be engaged in whatever it is that is enjoyable to them.

I talk with seniors who have recently retired frequently and they tell me they have never been busier, happier or more active.

And to be frank working in a job you hate can't be good for your physical or mental health.

Researchers in Finland believe that the long-term effects of stress may actually be the biggest cause of dementia. They are currently looking at the role chronic stress plays in the progression from mild thinking and memory problems - mild cognitive impairment - to Alzheimer's disease.

One might make the argument that if you are approaching retirement and are unhappy or stressed at work, early retirement might actually be in your best interest.

As a person on the cusp of retirement I am looking at ways to gradually exit the workforce. I could, for instance, retire from my day job but continue to write this column.

Well, maybe not. Recently I came across an article titled, Say goodbye to your job: Robots will make it extinct.

What jobs are most vulnerable? Right there at No. 2 on the list was writers. Apparently the pen is destined for the same fate as the sword.

Seriously? Yep. I don't joke about my livelihood.

Philip M. Parker, a professor of marketing at the Insead business school, has created software that can write a non-fiction book in 20 minutes.

A 320-page novel titled True Love, written by a computer, hit the stores in Russia in 2008.

I wonder how long it would take a computer to write my column? On second thought, do I really want to know? Tom Carney is the executive director 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.