



North Shore News Column.

Older & Wiser

By Tom Carney

Recent AGM address raises a few eyebrows

Differences between men and women and grey divorce among the hot topics

By Tom Carney, Special to North Shore News May 26, 2013

WHEN I spoke recently at the North Shore Meals on Wheels Society's annual general meeting, I opened my talk with a question: When does old age begin?

The first answer from the audience: 90 years of age.

Another person thought age had more to do with your attitude than the number of candles on your birthday cake.

I love a crowd like this. There is of course no right or wrong answer here but a recent survey of 3,000 adults ranging from the age of 18 to well over 65 found that people thought old age began at the age of 68.

Like many questions in life the definition of old age depends on who you ask. As people age, old age moves back. The older people get, the longer it takes for a person to reach old age.

Maybe it's true that you're only as old as you feel.

News that half a million Canadians are 85 or older and that Canada is home to approximately 6,000 centenarians (those 100 years of age or older) came as a surprise to many in the audience.

Are seniors going to bankrupt the health care system? Everyone in the audience had heard that one before. It's true that health care is more costly for people who are 65 and older.

Here's something that we don't often hear: Health care spending on seniors in Canada has remained relatively stable for the last decade.

Most of those in attendance thought that B.C. spends more on health care than the national average when, in fact, only Quebec spends less per capita on health care than we do.

Do the rich live longer than the rest of us? In a word: yes. In my business we call that the wealth gradient on mortality. Whether wealth causes better health or vice versa isn't quite as clear but if you're looking for a magic elixir for longevity look no further than your bank account.

Physician-assisted death is illegal in Canada and in all but three states in America. No matter what our Parlia-

ment or legislatures rule and regardless of what positions are taken by organizations either for or against physician-assisted death, the issue of patient-assisted suicide for the terminally ill should, in my opinion, remain a matter between a patient, their family and their physician.

Usually when I raise the topic of driving with a seniors audience, I bring a flak jacket. Senior drivers are often viewed as a hazard on the road but the facts are that young drivers are far more likely to cause accidents. Given that seniors are generally in poorer health and more frail, drivers aged 65 and older are at a much greater risk of serious injury or death when they do have an accident.

One expert has concluded that senior drivers pose a much larger risk to themselves than others.

Throughout my presentation I referenced the differences between men and women in the seniors population. Women may live longer than men but by most other measures (including income, rates of disability and social isolation) senior women in Canada come up short.

I sensed that some of the women in the audience were troubled by those statistics.

Time to level the playing field, I thought to myself, so I closed with the topic of grey divorce. In Canada the only age group that is seeing a rise in divorce is people over the age of 50.

When I mentioned that women initiated the majority of those divorces there was a stir in the audience. When I noted that in most cases the men didn't have a clue about what was about to hit them you could have heard a pin drop. I could have skipped the part about women being happier but less financially secure following a divorce (the opposite is true for men) but I didn't.

That evening I stopped on the way home and bought a bouquet of flowers for my wife because well, you just never know. I wouldn't be surprised if a few of the men in the audience did the same.

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.