



North Shore News Column.

Older & Wiser

By Tom Carney

Report suggests sweeping changes

IN 2008, B.C. ombudsperson Kim Carter launched a systematic investigation into seniors care issues in the province

By Tom Carney, Special to North Shore News February 26, 2012

When part one of the ombudsperson's report was released in December 2009 the government responded positively but action on the report has been painfully slow.

The news that the second report would be released in mid-February must have had the provincial government reaching for the AlkaSeltzer. While the first report focused exclusively on issues affecting seniors in care, part two covers all home and community care services, including home support and home care, assisted living and residential care.

Part two of the report is out now and it recommends sweeping changes in the way we care for seniors, including establishing the position of a seniors' advocate and improving transparency, enforceability of standards and ease of use in the seniors care sector.

Within hours of the release of the ombudsperson's report the government was out with a report of their own. At a press conference in Victoria the health minister unveiled a new seniors care action plan. Seniors, families and stakeholders were invited to help shape the implementation of a set of comprehensive actions to ensure a more accessible, transparent and accountable approach to seniors care.

In addition the minister announced that the province had committed \$15 million to the United Way of the Lower Mainland to expand the availability of non-medical home support services across the province and \$1.4 million to the B.C. Association of Community Response Networks to support prevention and education activities to end abuse and neglect of older adults.

Carter's report is 400 pages in length and was nearly three years in the making.

It includes 143 findings and makes 176 recommendations to the Ministry of Health and health authorities to make life better for seniors across the province. Even better, many of Carter's recommendations offer immediate benefits for seniors and government without significant cost.

The seniors care action plan from the Ministry of Health is full of good intentions but at a mere 10 pages it falls

well short of addressing the catalogue of deficits identified in the ombudsperson's report.

Let me be clear here about what I think is the challenge in meeting the health care needs of an aging population. Most of the calls I take from seniors on health care have to do with the difficulties in navigating the health care system rather than the quality of care. Surveys show that seniors love their hospitals and health care workers. But many of the seniors I hear from are frustrated and, in some cases, exhausted after trying to find the services they need, understand how the system works and have their concerns heard and addressed in a timely and respectful manner.

The ombudsperson's report is all about the changing needs and expectations of our aging population. We need to understand and be responsive to those changes. The lesson I take away from Carter's report is that our health care system must do more than simply provide excellent care. It's not just about outcomes anymore.

Access to services in a timely and informed way, consistent and fair delivery of care and protecting vulnerable seniors from abuse and neglect must be part of any benchmark that we use to measure how well the health care system serves us. I think the ombudsperson and the health minister would both agree with that and that's good news for all of us.

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.