

## Aging population raises concerns

### We are 'woefully' unprepared for the 'looming dementia epidemic'

[Tom Carney](#) / North Shore News

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This is not the column I wanted to write the week before Christmas.

Earlier this month Joan Warren, a senior with dementia, wandered away from her North Shore care facility. Three days later her body was found near the Lynn Canyon suspension bridge. Initial indications are she died of hypothermia.

This is a tragic incident and my condolences go out to the family.

Sadly, the response to this incident was all too predictable. The care facility declined comment other than expressing their "heartfelt sympathies," citing privacy concerns.

The provincial government expressed their condolences adding that the first priority of government and the health authorities is patient safety and security.

There were questions raised about the search method, about the "business" behind caring for B.C.'s seniors and whether or not the facility had the proper care plan in place for Warren. Several investigations are now underway and when all is said and done I expect to hear a statement from government telling us that measures will be put in place to ensure a tragic incident like this one never happens again.

But it will happen again.

It will happen again because we are woefully unprepared for the looming dementia epidemic that is facing us.

Alzheimer's disease and related dementias affect 70,000 individuals in B.C. and that number is expected to double by the year 2038.

It will happen again because 60 to 70 per cent of those with dementia will wander and the majority of people in care facilities have dementia.

In America there are approximately 125,000 search and rescue missions deployed for missing Alzheimer's patients every year.

It will happen again because we haven't yet figured out how to balance the need to keep a person with dementia safe with ethical concerns about locking them up like prisoners in a jail.

An upcoming conference on how we can protect and keep care facility residents safe, scheduled for early in the New Year in Vancouver, is almost sold out.

It will happen again because, in my opinion, the health authorities who license these facilities have got their priorities wrong. Authorities explain that they prefer to work collaboratively with facilities to ensure all regulations are followed. That's not their job. Their job is to monitor and inspect licensed community care facilities to ensure

they comply with provincial adult care regulations and when they don't to impose sanctions.

It will happen again because even when we get leaders from the Group of Eight (G8) industrialized countries together for a special summit on dementia, as we did last month in Britain, it's hard to get them to take meaningful action.

Only 13 countries have national dementia plans.

Canada isn't one of them.

The Warrens have lost a member of their family. They are, of course, looking for some answers here.

I suspect they will be disappointed.

When the investigations are complete, it's likely we will know how Warren died but we will never know why she died.

To the family I offer my condolences.

To my readers, I hope you are surrounded by love and warmth this holiday season. Merry Christmas.

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