

OLDER AND WISER: North Shore Caregiver Expo shares tips and tools with those who provide support

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May 9, 2018 02:00 PM



Margot Ware of Shylo Home Healthcare was one of many local businesses, support groups and guest speakers on hand for the third annual Caregiver Expo held on the North Shore May 5. The expo provides tips and tools for caregivers, both professional and unpaid. photo Paul McGrath, North Shore News

Caregiving for a spouse, a family member or another adult is a challenge in our community.

As I heard at a recent Caregiver Expo, held May 5 on the North Shore: “Upstream, downstream the system is struggling.” It’s a challenge for unpaid caregivers, the homecare health system, and the paid caregiving sector as well.

According to Family Caregivers of British Columbia, “There are over one million people (the estimated population of the province is 4,606,371) providing unpaid care for adult family

members and friends in British Columbia. Family caregivers are a vital part of the health-care team and their health is just as important as the health of the person they're looking after.”

An unpaid caregiver is a person who provides emotional or practical support for an adult family member or friend. Though caregiving can be rewarding, it can also be stressful. Many caregivers experience a lack of family supports, challenges navigating the health-care system, difficulty in finding appropriate resources, feelings of guilt and worry about their caregiving skills and high levels of stress and burnout.

There are groups that can help, including Family Caregivers of B.C. and the North Shore Community Resources Society. NSCR provides several services for caregivers, including workshops, support groups, education sessions, information and consultation.

The society also sponsors the Resource Guide for Family Caregivers: North Shore Edition, an invaluable booklet outlining and listing tools, tips, and services to support a caregiver in their role.

The private caregiving sector on the North Shore is there to assist when possible, as many in need of support may not have a family member or friend who are able to step in or the health-care system may not be available to assist. Clearly there is an important role for the private sector in providing both basic and supplementary services.

Unfortunately, many of the private sector companies are having trouble with staffing levels, which means they may have to turn people away. And on the North Shore, a lack of affordable housing and transit issues have proven to be roadblocks in maintaining proper staffing levels.

B.C.'s seniors advocate Isobel Mackenzie looked at homecare and home support in a report released last year. Regrettably, Mackenzie found in her report that: “The average home support hours delivered per client per year decreased by three per cent from the previous year, while the number of clients increased by 3.5 per cent. As well there has been a 23.5 per cent increase in the number of homecare complaints over last year; this includes professional services such as nursing and physical therapy, as well as home support.”

During the North Shore's third annual Caregiver Expo, presented by the North Shore News and sponsored by Living Well Homecare Services, Shylo Home Healthcare, Remedy's Rx, We Care Home Health, and Comfort Keepers, caregivers were given the opportunity to “feel celebrated while learning about the various support services available on the North Shore for themselves and for the ones they are caring for.”

The expo was a resource to connect like-minded people and to provide a venue for networking between private sector providers and unpaid caregivers.

The Expo brought together several exhibitors including the sponsors and a number of other private caregivers. I found the information very helpful in looking at my future possibilities.

The expo also provided a venue for presentations on laughter yoga, family communication and the power of boundaries, the rollercoaster of grief, preventing caregiver burnout, the science of balance, self-care with giving, inspiring best quality of life, preplanning end of life, energy boosting and the importance of a power of attorney and representation agreements.

Getting support through the expo makes the challenge of caregiving easier and more rewarding – don't miss it next year.

Margaret Coates is the co-ordinator of Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. She has lived on the North Shore for 47 years and has worked for and with seniors for 20 of those years. Ideas for future columns are welcome Email: lions_view@telus.net.

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