

Aging in the Kawarthas: Creativity required

Seniors who call Kawartha Lakes their home can consider themselves blessed as we live in a lovely place. Small towns, with good neighbours, accessible health care, and a beautiful environment to get outside and enjoy the sights.

But aging in place can be more of a challenge than a lot of seniors hope, as discussed in the last few articles. Gone are the days when neighbourhood kids show up to help shovel snow and, given that we are a very rural environment, if you don't have access to a vehicle our public transportation can be tricky.



Graham Bashford.

Something as simple as getting blood work done can lead to a half day investment due to our having only one blood lab in town, and anyone who's been in the Ross Emergency department knows to expect to be there for a while so bring a book.

The fact of aging in the Kawarthas is that utilizing community resources for services, while affordable, is becoming increasingly difficult to count on. Many seniors will need to

try and get creative.

Booking ahead of time with Community Care transport is a wonderful and economical way to get rides to appointments, and the people who drive are called to do that type of work so you'll never get a driver you don't like.

The Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) also works very hard to provide in-home support, even following a local senior to a private retirement residence when required. The LHIN took over for the Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) after an audit revealed that only 62 cents per dollar was reaching actual client care. But the LHIN is limited as it takes around 6 weeks to get care implemented in the home and is far easier coming out of a brief hospital stay than arranging in a non-crisis situation. Begging the question, why are we waiting for crisis before seeking help?

As local seniors age it is now essential to do some homework prior to waiting and seeing how things are going to go. More and more seniors are getting creative with obtaining the services they can from government-funded agencies and then using some private funds to bridge the gap between the two.

A great deal of "home care" agencies are huge national companies that are very often unionized making it difficult for them, or even eliminating, their ability to adapt to a senior's rapidly changing situation. If a senior is lucky enough to obtain in-home subsidized services they quickly learn that if someone is to come to do light housekeeping he or she cannot also take the senior for a walk. Or, if they are contracted to help with a shower twice a week they cannot touch a dish in the sink. This is the day we live in; liability trumps client's needs.

Most, not all, private service providers can try to push the boundaries when it comes to services in a senior's home and can adapt to changes. Something as simple as a urinary tract

infection can take a high functioning senior living at home and drastically effect cognition and behaviour in a day. But setting up services in 24 hours isn't as easy as most think – it's not like ordering a pizza.

According to Statistics Canada average life expectancy in 1991 for both genders (blended) was 77.8 years. In 2017 the average for both sexes was 81.5 years, with Ontario having the highest life expectancy. As we live longer as a rule dementia or memory impairment is much more prevalent. Often when a senior suffers from some type of dementia they are still physically fit, with good blood pressure, but can't remember if they ate breakfast or not. Because of this seniors with dementia living alone should be watched for weight gain or weight loss. This applies to their pets as well. Some will prepare a lunch, watch *Price is Right*, and then prepare lunch again. So many seniors who are physically healthy can't function without support, but with our rapidly aging population all too often the more measurable physical ailments are tended to first.

There is support out there, but you need to be proactive to find it, ask questions, and for heaven's sake minimum wage will be at \$15 per hour in a year so expect that it comes at a cost. Gone are the days when flipping a quarter to the paper boy will bring a smile to his face, and unless its plugged in or online the idea of raking grass or shovelling isn't in most young people's wheel house.

Visit your local LHIN, which has lists of both private and public support. You will be surprised how much is out there. But don't wait until the last minute when it comes to health care. They close at 4:30 pm.