Aging: Exploding the Myths

We are all aging — every day of our life. Every one of us started to age before we were born and we continue to do so throughout our entire life course. Aging is a natural process and should be welcomed, because the alternative would be premature death.

The vast majority of older people enjoy sound health, lead very active and fulfilling lives, and can muster intellectual, emotional and social reserves often unavailable to younger people.

In recognition of the International Year of Older Persons the World Health Organization has published a booklet from which this article is excerpted. This booklet explores the myths of aging and outlines how the principles of Active Aging help maintain health and creativity throughout the lifespan.

Myth No. 1: Most older people live in developed countries

The reverse is true. Most older people, over 60% of them, live in developing countries. There are currently about 580 million older people in the world, with 355 million in developing countries.

Myth No. 2: Older people are all the same

Older people constitute a very diverse group. People age in unique ways, depending on a large variety of factors, including their gender, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and whether they live in industrialized or developing countries, in urban or rural settings.

Individual variations in biological characteristics tend to be greater between older people than between young ones. Such diversity leads to considerable difficulties in interpreting results of scientific studies on aging which are often conducted on particular, well-defined groups of older people: the findings may not apply to a large proportion or even the majority of older people.

Myth No. 3: Men and women age the same way

Women and men age differently. First of all, women live longer than men. Part of women's advantage with respect to life expectancy is biological. Far from being the weaker sex, they seem to be more resilient than men at all ages, but particularly during early infancy. In adult life too, women may have a biological advantage, at least until menopause, where hormones protect them from ischemic heart disease, for example.

The natural advantage in women's life expectancy is significantly reduced in societies where female infant mortality is higher and where girls face discrimination. Social and economic disadvantages also have important repercussions in many other areas. For example, in all countries, inequalities in income and wealth in earlier life mean that older women tend to be poorer than older men.

Myth No. 4: Older people are frail

Far from being frail, the vast majority of older people remain physically fit well into later life. As well as being able to carry out the tasks of daily living, they continue to play an active part in community life. In other words, they maintain high functional capacity.

The capacity of our biological systems increases during the first years of life, reaches its peak in early...
Acting Our Age: An Introduction to this Issue of WellSpring

Jennifer Tuininga

Physical activity is important throughout an individual’s lifespan as benefits can be attained at any age. For older adults regular physical activity is essential to their ability to perform daily tasks and to maintain their independence.

Currently, the older adult segment of our population is made up of individuals who are better educated, more skilled and healthier than those of previous generations. The majority of older adults are active, and live independently in their own homes. High older adult physical activity levels and subsequent good health are important to the viability of our province’s social services. As long as individuals can maintain their health and independence they are able to continue as contributing members of society.

Older workers contribute their expertise and experience on the job by training younger employees and providing organizations with a strong staff base. They also fill an intricate and important role in our communities through providing countless volunteer hours and ongoing support as informal caregivers to spouses, family members, friends and grandchildren.

To meet the growing number of information requests regarding older adults and physical activity, the ACFWB has established the position of Older Adult Coordinator. The Coordinator along with other staff work with clients in their practices in the workplace by providing resources, research, information and consultation.

For older adults regular physical activity is essential to their ability to perform daily tasks and to maintain their independence.

Practitioners are able to borrow books, manuals, videotapes and periodicals through the Resource Library. Some of these resources, such as the "101 Active Living Ideas for Older Adults" brochure, the Older Adult Resources Pad, and the upcoming Older Adult Physical Activity Video and Manual have been created by ACFWB staff.

Researchers from the ACFWB have conducted research looking at the availability of physical activity programs in continuing care facilities, and are currently involved in a similar survey of Alberta seniors’ lodges. Our researchers also conduct a biannual Alberta survey to monitor physical activity levels across the province. This research has found a marked increase in the physical activity rates of older Albertans over the last few years.

Within this issue of WellSpring you will read about a broad number of issues and concerns regarding older adults including housing, retirement, recreation, and voluntarism. As you read the articles think about how you can apply the information in your workplace and community. Further the knowledge of others by sharing your copy of WellSpring with a co-worker or family member.

Jennifer Tuininga is the Older Adult Coordinator at the Alberta Centre for Well-Being. She is responsible for networking and providing resources and information to practitioners about older adults physical activity.

Aging: Exploding the Myths continued from page 1

adulthood and declines thereafter. How fast it declines, however, is largely determined by external factors relating to adult life style, including smoking, alcohol consumption, diet and social class.

Myth No. 5: Older people have nothing to contribute

The truth is that older people make innumerable contributions to their families, societies and economies. The conventional view that perpetuates this myth tends to focus on participation in the labour force and its decline with increasing age. It is widely assumed that the fall in numbers of older people in paid work is due to a decline in functional capacity associated with aging. In fact, declining functional capacity does not by any means equate to inability to work. Indeed, the physical requirements of many jobs have been reduced by technological advances, permitting severely disabled people to be fully economically productive. In addition, the fact that there are fewer older people in paid work is more often due to disadvantages in education, training and particularly to 'ageism', than to older age per se.

The widely held belief that older people have nothing to contribute also relies on the notion that only paid occupations count. However, substantial contributions are made by older people in unpaid work including agriculture, the informal sector and in voluntary roles. Many economies worldwide depend on a large extent on these activities, but few of them are included in the assessment of national economic activities, leaving the contribution made by older citizens often unnoticed and undervalued.

Myth No. 6: Older people are an economic burden on society

Older people contribute in innumerable ways to the economic development of their societies. Most older persons around the world continue to work, in both paid and unpaid jobs, making a significant contribution to the economic prosperity of their communities.

The growing number of older people who expect health care and old-age pensions should not be viewed as a threat or a crisis. It is an opportunity, rather, to develop policies that will ensure decent living standards for all members of society, young and old, in the future.

Adapted from Aging: Exploding the Myths by a 22 page booklet published by the World Health Organization.

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Retirement is not a Fairy Tale
Canadians need to get serious about planning

Rein Selles, M.Sc., P.R.P.

For nearly a decade, Canadian studies and polls have shown that while middle-aged adults may recognize the need for retirement planning, few actually follow through with any behaviour. Rather than undertaking concrete steps to secure their future, Canadians would appear to take the attitude of Cinderella, waiting for a fairy godmother to rescue them from a life of drudgery. The only difference is that, for Canadians, their fairy godmother is a lottery ticket.

According to a 1997 poll conducted by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC), one in ten Canadians are hoping that some of their retirement income will be generated by winning a lottery. When compared to setting aside savings in a tax sheltered account, more Canadians buy lottery tickets than contribute to such plans. Characteristics Canada found that only three of ten taxpayers contributed to a retirement savings plan in 1997 and contributed only 13.5% of their allowable contribution limits. Yet, a national study conducted by Gallup Canada in 1998 showed three out of four Canadians expect they will be financially self-sufficient in retirement.

The Expectations Gap
When the gap between expectations of early retirement and reality of poor personal planning widens, it is likely to have implications for lifestyle choices. In the 1999 poll by the CIBC, it was found that while most Canadians would like to retire early at 60, most say they will have to keep working to 65 and perhaps need some part-time work beyond that age to make ends meet.

The CIBC study included an evaluation of the finances of current retirees. About 35% indicated that they were worse off financially than during their pre-retirement years and as a result, 15% of these retirees have returned to work.

The Goal of Retirement Planning
The marketing and sale of financial products has generated some confusion about retirement planning. If advertisements about retirement were to be believed, it would seem that the act of committing to a particular financial product automatically generates the lifestyle of choice.

The goal of an effective retirement plan is not the accumulation of a mountain of money. It is the ability to maintain the integrity of lifestyle choices over time. Poor health, insufficient income, inappropriate housing, inadequate social support, and a lack of meaningful activities can lead to an individual with fewer choices now and at retirement.

Effective retirement planning identifies areas where individual behaviour can change today and thereby create better outcomes at retirement.

Personal Health
Good health allows the opportunity for greater participation whereas poor health creates restrictions to lifestyle choices. As such, retirement planning requires adults to take responsibility for effective health management strategies throughout a lifetime. Retirees suggest that good health is an important factor contributing to satisfaction in retirement.

While many middle-aged Canadians can demonstrate knowledge of effective health management practices, this problem is implementation. In order to increase the likelihood of follow-through, retirement planners recommend working with a health professional on a personalized health plan.

During the past decade, resources for health care have changed. For older Canadians, the health care system has become more difficult to understand and access. A key skill will be the ability to advocate for personal health care within a complex and changing system. Learning how the health care system works is a good beginning point for a retirement plan.

Adequate Income
Money is a basic commodity which has considerable influence on the quality of lifestyle achieved. Financial resources are subject to the impact of external, uncontrollable factors such as inflation and changes in government policy. Consequently, financial planning and management are necessary to ensure maintenance of desired lifestyle. This is particularly important in preparing for retirement because of a more fixed and reduced income.

Develop a disciplined approach to managing your financial resources. At least once per year, bring together your financial data in one place (a binder) so that you can determine whether:

- you are meeting your goals;
- you are growing rather than reducing or remaining stagnant;
- you have opportunities to lower tax;
- your lifestyle is consistent with your income and need to save (speed less).

Legal & Estate Planning
This is an important component of financial planning and management which refers specifically to significant death and personal health or the issues of death and bereavement. Inadequate planning in these areas can lead to significant personal and family stress. The lack of personal planning is inevitable in life and requires both financial and emotional preparation. Prior planning in the area of finances, wills, enduring powers of attorney, personal directives, and funeral arrangements can have very positive and buffering effects for the survivors and other care givers.

If you have never had an interest in this area, try putting yourself in the position of being a survivor or care giver. Most legal issues in retirement come about because those around us refuse to do adequate planning. Ask your friends and family:

- Do you have a plan in place so that if you get sick I can help maintain your personal lifestyle and financial security?
- If you die, do you have a plan in place to ensure that I will not have to go to court to prove ownership (probate)?

Life insurance may be considered to help cover the expense and the loss of income.

Living Arrangements
"Home" satisfaction is an important lifestyle choice and consideration in overall life satisfaction. Where one lives is not always a personal choice as it can be dictated by career, employment, finances, or other issues. What is critical is that an individual's needs are met. For some, it may mean being close to family, for others access to certain community facilities. It is often assumed that retirement represents a time of considerable change and that most of this is part of that change.

Moisture or retirement is a choice which requires careful examination. Begin by evaluating your current housing as a home in retirement. Changes are your current home was never considered for retirement. Ask yourself:

- Is my home designed for retirement living?
- Will I be able to handle the cost of maintenance and repair over the long term?
- Will I need the capital from my home to supplement my retirement income?

Meaningful Interests and Activities
Most adults engage in a variety of interests and activities. In order to contribute to life satisfaction, these interests must be meaningful, purposeful and rewarding in retirement. Work will play a special role in the retirement plans of many Canadians in the future as an either an opportunity to use skills or as a means of supporting lifestyle choices.

If you were to stop working today, could you see yourself retired? Many of the interests and activities that will be important in retirement need to be learned and developed now. That means finding ways to pursue personal, family and career goals. Try not to see retirement as a six week experience such as a trip. Develop interests that can be done on a variety of conditions and circumstances as your own life changes with age.

Family and Social Support
As adults we seek quality relationships and need to know that there are supports for us when in need. Quality relationships require commitment, cooperation and effective communication. It is the act of involvement with people as the most important factor in retirement satisfaction.

It is likely that retirement will initially result in a loss of relationships due to the loss of colleagues at work. Planning activities during the early years of retirement that bring you into the community and in contact with a variety of people of all ages. Volunteering work, in particular, can generate a new circle of friends that will take the place of those relationships lost at retirement.

Who Can Help?
While a variety of professional planners practice in the area of retirement, the role of the Professional Retirement Planner (PRP) has only been recently developed. A list of professional retirement planners is available on the world wide web at: www.retirementplanners.ca.

For those who would enjoy developing a retirement plan on their own, the "Retire Sure. For Life!" program combines both lifestyle and financial planning principles to answer these questions:

1. Am I ready to retire?
2. Will I be healthy when I retire?
3. Will I have enough money to retire?

Information on the program can be accessed on the Internet at: www.retirementchallenge.com.

Rein Selles is President of RetirementLife Challenge Ltd., of St. Albert, Alberta. He is Past President of the Canadian Association of Pre-Retirement Planners and Chairman of the Standing Committee for the Canadians Registry of Professional Retirement Planners.
Housing Options for the Older Person

Sheila Power

As the population ages and people are living longer, questions regarding suitable housing options inevitably arise. Seeking information about appropriate housing for parents frequently falls to the adult children, most often to daughters or daughters-in-law. While many younger people plan for their later years, many others reach a crisis in their life, such as the death of a spouse or being discharged from hospital before coming to the realization that they should have moved earlier.

So what options are available? First, we need to determine the senior’s income level, since alternatives include low-income subsidized accommodation as well as the private housing market.

Subsidized housing is available as self-contained apartments, frequently built at high rise blocks. This is preferred by many senior citizens as it allows for the level of security that is desired by the older, more vulnerable people. One-bedroom apartments are usually around 525 square feet, while some studio apartments are somewhat smaller. Rent for these units is calculated as thirty percent of the occupants income. A building manager, who wears many hats from social worker to building operator, is usually the only staff person allocated to the building. If the senior person is frail, the building systems are the shelter of choice. This is a popular choice for the very elderly. The lodges provide an institutional room and board environment where each resident has a bed sitting room of their own. Meals are taken in the dining room and there are communal lounges where residents can meet and visit. People living in lodges have to be reasonably capable of caring for themselves, although home care nurses frequently play a major role in their daily care.

While both of these shelter options in Alberta are always filled to capacity and long waiting lists ensue, there is relief for some through the Rent Supplement Program. As the name suggests, some private apartments are subsidised. This arrangement is a cooperative effort between the private sector and the Alberta Government, which provides the subsidy.

The rental market also offers apartments of all shapes, sizes and prices. Before the current vacancy crunch it wasn’t difficult to rent an apartment in a “flats and over” building but this seems to be a commodity that is disappearing. Some buildings are now advertised as “adult only” (eight years over) or being refurbished and sold as condominium apartments.

Luxury lodge accommodation is also available in the private market. This offers luxurious surroundings, amenities and programs, together with on site nursing care and safe haven for people with dementia and, of course, a much higher rental charge. For those people who can afford this type of accommodation it is a very comfortable way to spend ones retirement years. At this level each occupant resides in a one-bedroom apartment which they furnish. Kitchen areas are tiny, as a larger common dining room is available for all meals, snacks and beverages.

The option to purchase a condominium apartment is a popular choice when downsizing from the family home. Smaller quarters no care for, no snow shoveling, no lawns to cut, and continued security and maintenance when the occupants take a vacation are among the main attractions to this type of living. In purpose-built senior condominium apartments it is frequently possible to purchase different packages to suit ones needs. Package options may include an evening meal package, or weekly apartment cleaning or laundry. Social activities within the complex and day outings plays an important part in the resident’s lifestyle.

In selecting a new place to live security is number one on a senior’s list. A safe neighborhood, a good level of security in the apartment building and parking areas are necessary.

Many senior people will move across the city or the country so that they can spend their retirement years with children and grandchildren.

All are encouraged to make their new home in an area that is a short and easy drive from their family’s home. Hospitals, the doctor’s office, and favorite grocery store should also be in reasonable proximity to the senior’s new residence.

Sheila Power is a counsellor with Housing Services at the Varsity Centre in Calgary. She can be reached at Ph: (403) 748-3238.
Older Adults and Physical Activity

The Alberta Advantage

John Spence, PhD
Senior Research Associate, Alberta Centre for Well-Being

According to demographics, the Canadian population is getting older. Our fertility rate is decreasing while, at the same time, people are living longer. In 1991, 11.6% of the Canadian population was 65 years of age or older. By the year 2011, it is estimated that this figure will have risen to 14%. This trend is driven by the “baby-boom” generation and concerns about quality of life, particularly those related to health, are becoming more pronounced.

While older adults currently make up 10% of the Alberta population, they utilize over 40% of the provincial health services budget. It is likely that costs related to the treatment of chronic diseases such as diabetes, osteoarthritis, and cardiovascular disease account for much of this expenditure. For this reason, along with concerns about quality of life, consideration should be given to disease prevention.

Health promotion efforts such as increasing the physical activity level of all Albertans, older adults in particular, require increased recognition as worthy public health endeavors.

Health promotion efforts such as increasing the physical activity level of all Albertans, older adults in particular, require increased recognition as worthy public health endeavors. A considerable body of research now exists that demonstrates physical inactivity constitutes a major public health concern with related social and economic costs. We also know that physical activity is associated with significant health benefits for individuals and populations across the life span. This is supported by the growing body of evidence which reports health gains among seniors who remain physically active throughout life. Together with enhanced psychological well-being, physical activity can lead to an increase in balance and muscular strength that, in turn, increases the individual’s ability to perform the activities of daily living. In fact, the physical activity level of older adults is directly related to their ability to live independently.

Building on the evidence, a number of documents and action statements aimed at fostering increased physical activity among older adults have been produced. For instance, The American College of Sports Medicine recently released a position statement on physical activity for older adults. On the Canadian scene, in a product similar to the Canada Food Guide, Health Canada has developed physical activity guidelines specific to older adults.

The central theme of these documents is that physical activity, in a variety of forms and modes, should be engaged in by older adults on most days of the week. In the same vein, Active Living Coalition for Older Adults recently released A Blueprint for Action for Active Living & Older Adults: Moving through the years.

Contributing to this momentum, in Alberta several recommendations within the recent Alberta Active Living Strategy pertain to older adults. Also, initiatives such as the Alberta Council on Ageing, Senior Friendly Project and an Older Adult Coordinator at the Alberta Centre for Well-Being (ACFWB) reflect support for enhanced physical activity levels of older adults in this province.

The ACFWB research mandate is to explore the benefits, barriers and deterrents of physical activity for all Albertans. In a recent ACFWB survey, 55% of non-institutionalized Albertans (i.e., those having access to a telephone and not residing in prisons, hospitals, or continuing care facilities) report they are physically active. Of those aged 65+ years and living independently, 59% are active or more times per week. While barriers such as health conditions exist, the activity levels among older adults are very good overall.

Nonetheless, there are gaps in the research literature on physical activity and the elderly. Until recently, no information existed on the degree to which physical activity programs were offered in continuing care facilities in Alberta. However, a recent report by the ACFWB found that all continuing care centers in the province offer physical activity opportunities to their residents. The program coordinators within the centers estimated that approximately 44% of the residents participated in the physical activity programs offered. While these numbers are encouraging, the programs were lacking in several areas such as weight training and frequency of balance and flexibility activities. Overall, the physical activity level of older Albertans is good and it appears that the next generation will be as active if not more so. However, as indicated in Canada’s new physical activity guidelines for older adults, there is much more physical activity than just walking. Future programs and research should endorse, promote, and include the guidelines and highlight the recommendations for strength, flexibility and balance.

Notes

Older Smokers: Butt out

According to a study in the American Journal of Epidemiology, you’re never too old to benefit from kicking the habit. Researchers monitored 477 men age 65 years and older for eight years. Those who ditched their cigarettes had a 23 percent lower death rate than those who kept smoking. Of course, the men who had never smoked fared best of all, they had only half the mortality rate of the smokers.

—Consumer Reports on Health, February 1999

Chalk One Up for Chocolate

Now that health benefits are claimed for honey, garlic, and green tea, it’s no surprise to find candy on the health-food list, placed there by Dr. James Lee of Harvard and Dr. Ralph Paffenbarger Jr. In the latest segment of a large, ongoing study that has yielded impressive information over the years about the benefits of exercise, these researchers find that men who eat candy in moderation (one to three candy bars a month) live longer than those who eat physical activity than just walking. Future programs and research should endorse, promote, and include the guidelines and highlight the recommendations for strength, flexibility and balance.

—University of California, Berkeley - Wellness Letter, April 1999
Aging in Alberta: Rhetoric and Reality

Herbert C. Northcott

Perhaps there is not a population aging problem. After all, Alberta has a relatively low percentage of seniors compared to the other provinces in Canada and compared to older nations such as many of the European countries. Given that these “older” jurisdictions seem to have coped quite well with their aging populations, it seems likely that Alberta will also manage reasonably well. Furthermore, an aging population might even have positive aspects. For example, seniors represent a relatively large pool of discretionary income and investment capital. Seniors also constitute a substantial potential volunteer force, with the time, skills, and often the inclination to participate in various aspects of community life. In short, a large aged population may well turn out to be both an economic and social asset.

Much of the debate concerning the future service delivery implications of population aging is based on assumptions about the needs of the elderly population. For example, seniors are disproportionately users of health care services. This statistical fact fuels misperceptions. While seniors may be at greater risk for health care and other problems, studies after study have shown that the great majority of seniors are healthy, happy, and able to live independently. Even at an advanced age, most seniors are able to live independently or with a modest amount of assistance from informal or formal sources. Furthermore, the great bulk of assistance is supplied informally (mostly buy family members) rather than by the formal delivery system. In other words, if there is a problem it is not with seniors, but rather with the relatively small percentage of seniors who have become dependent for reasons such as declining health, inadequate financial resources, or lack of informal social supports.

The Percentage of the Canadian Population Which is Seniors, by Province and Territory, 1998.

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<th>Province</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Northwest Territories</td>
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Source: Statistics Canada

Putting Expertise Back into the Community

Seniors Voluntarily Make the Difference at the Kerby Centre

Grant Allen

Over the next twenty years 9.8 million “boomers” will turn 65 in Canada. Many are not waiting for their birthdays to retire. Still healthy and active, these people are looking for fulfillment and want to develop new interests. Volunteering is a gratifying way for them to put the skills they acquired during their working years to work for the community.

In the Kerby Centre’s many services, seniors apply their knowledge and experience to help their peers and families by augmenting the paid staff to operate a large senior’s multi-service agency. The Kerby Centre has 96 full-time and 10 part-time staff serving over 25,000 seniors every year. This would be an impossible task without volunteer assistance. There are approximately 600 volunteers, primarily seniors, who work at the Centre.

The Kerby Centre offers unique opportunities for seniors to create a special community on their own, without isolating themselves from society at large. At the Kerby Centre, seniors not only avail themselves of vital services, they also provide the very services needed and used by their peers.

The mission of the Kerby Centre is to assist older people to live as well as possible, for as long as possible, as a resident in the community.

The Average Number of Hours Volunteered by Canadians, by Age Group, 1997.

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<th>Age Group</th>
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<td>55-64</td>
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<tr>
<td>65 and over</td>
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Source: Statistics Canada

How Volunteers Contribute

In the early years of the Kerby Centre, when there were no tables, nor the funds to purchase them, several volunteers who were skilled carpenters staffed the woodworkng shop. These volunteers constructed wooden tables that served for many years until new metal tables were in the budget. The services provided by the shop made an indelible contribution to the success that the Kerby Centre now enjoys.

The shop continues to be operated by skilled workers who make articles to assist in fundraising, as well as in conducting construction projects around the Centre. There are few places in the Kerby Centre that do not have tangible evidence of the skills of these people including acoustical baffles and a new stage in the gymnasium.

In the wellness centre, a number of retired health professionals administer many tests required to monitor an individual’s health status. The volunteers in this area provide blood pressure testing, blood glucose monitoring, health counseling, and assistance in the foot clinic, all essential services for maintaining a healthy old age. As well, the families of seniors are often given counseling to assist them in keeping the seniors healthy. A retired heart specialist counsels seniors and their families for one half day per week.

Kerby also has volunteers who continue to expand their abilities by learning and volunteering in areas outside of their previous careers. A retired physician became interested in computers when personal computers were in their infancy. This interest sparked a lifelong passion which was converted into action at the Kerby Centre. He became knowledgeable about networks and worked tirelessly to update the Kerby computer system.

Thanks to this volunteer’s efforts the Kerby Centre is ready for Y2K.

My personal involvement with the Kerby Centre has been as a volunteer in many areas. Since my experience as a professional engineer included participation in numerous industrial and building projects, I was recently requested to assist in the planning and construction of Kerby Rotary House, a shelter for abused seniors. This project was a first in North America and required significant in-depth planning since there were no models to follow.

The foregoing are only a few examples of how volunteers are making contributions within the Kerby Centre. In this way, seniors continue to be healthy productive members of society and not a drain on scarce resources as they are sometimes incorrectly portrayed.

Volunteer Coordination

To create a positive volunteer experience, beneficial to both the individual and the organization, it is essential that there be a procedure in place to effectively use the skills of seniors. In the case of the Kerby Centre the volunteer department works with other departments to place the senior in an appropriate setting.

The volunteer department assesses the capabilities and preferences of volunteers and tries to match these to the needs of the Centre. When a match has been made, the volunteer is oriented, both to the specific task and to the Centre itself. An on-going follow-up is carried out to ensure that the fit of the volunteer to the assigned task is working.

Volunteers play a vital role in the operation of the Kerby Centre and without their enthusiastic and selfless contributions of time and energy over the past 25 years, the Centre would not be the successful and thriving organization that it is today.

Grant Allen, R.A.C.E., formerly the Director of Engineering for Mokmeki Western Properties, is a volunteer at the Kerby Centre in Calgary, Alberta. The Kerby Centre is a multi-service centre providing services, resources, and programs for seniors.
Aging in the New Millennium

Mary Engelmann, RSW

Throughout the world the proportion of older people in the population is growing, and it is significant that the United Nations has declared this year to be the International Year of Older Persons. Canada and Alberta are no exceptions to this growth in the proportion of the older population. It is projected that during the almost twenty years between 1997 and 2016, the proportion of persons aged 65 and over in Alberta’s population will grow from 10.4% to 15.1%.

By the year 2011, the oldest of the baby boom generation, those born between 1946 to 1961, will be entering their senior years. What will these seniors in the new millennium be like?

On average, people are living longer. In 1986 the average life expectancy for men was 74 years and for women 80 years. It is projected that in 2016 it will be age 78 for men and 83 for women.

There will be greater diversity in the senior population. A sizable proportion of the future seniors will come from a variety of other countries and cultures. But more importantly, all seniors will have developed, over six decades of living, a great many different interests, attitudes and life styles.

They will have higher expectations. The seniors of the future will want and expect to maintain the standards of living they had before retirement. They will not accept less, simply because they are older. They will expect and demand more choice in living arrangements and services.

On average, their incomes will be higher. On average, the incomes of seniors are increasing; they rose by 16 percent between 1981 and 1994 in Canada.

Seniors no longer are the poorest group in society. However, it must be remembered that there are, and will continue to be some older people who, because of the increasing reliance on part-time and contract work, will have little or no income in their retirement years.

They will have had more years of schooling.

Six out of ten of the current generation of seniors have never completed high school. This will change due to the educational levels of younger generations in society. These seniors of the future will be generally more informed and more able to obtain information as needed.

They will be healthier.

Unless there is a major change in recent trends, the seniors of the 21st Century will be healthier than today’s seniors. Despite a number of counter examples showing increasing health and decreasing disability in each generation of seniors, 4

They will be more knowledgeable about and able to use technology.

Future seniors will be more computer literate. They will use this technology to obtain information of all kinds. They will have greater knowledge about and willingness to use technological aids to enhance their capacity for independent living.

Future seniors will be more computer literate. They will use this technology to obtain information of all kinds.

They will probably have a more active lifestyle.

With somewhat more income, better health and more education, these seniors will probably be involved in a greater range of leisure and volunteer activities.

They will have more political clout.

They will constitute a larger share of the voting population and, as a generally more informed and active group, may be more willing to exercise this political power.

A major issue facing the seniors of the future is the all too prevalent belief, promoted to some degree by the media, that the growing senior population will be a burden—a drain on the resources of younger people. This belief can lead to inter-generational tension and to older people feeling negatively about themselves and what they can and are able to contribute. We need to get the facts about aging and older persons and the contributions made by our senior citizens.

Let’s encourage more inter-generational opportunities and activities, so that more people may learn about aging and recognize that it is a right to our society that so many people are now living longer and healthier lives.

It is most appropriate that the theme of the 1997 United Nations International Year of Older Persons is “Towards a Society for All Ages” – a theme which reflects a concern for ensuring age integration in society and which stresses the importance of harmony between generations.

In closing, as the United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros said in connection with World Health Day, “We are, in short, in the midst of a demographic revolution whose social and economic consequences we cannot ignore. Meeting this challenge will mean changing commonly held views of older persons. It will mean no longer thinking of the aged population at a burden, rather to a treasure of resources acquired throughout life. We must recognize the potential capacity of older persons and the insubstantial contributions that are made to society.”

2. Ibid.

Mary Engelmann is the former Director of the Senior Citizen Secretariat, and past President of the Alberta Association on Gerontology.

CENTRE HAPPENINGS

Advisory Board Vacancies

Are you interested in well-being, active living, and health promotion? The Alberta Centre for Well-Being is looking for individuals from north of Edmonton and the southern part of Alberta to fill two vacancies on our Advisory Board. Each position is for a two year term with two meetings per year. The mission of the Centre is to support practitioners to improve the health and quality of life of Albertans through physical activity.

Interested individuals are invited to contact Ivy Spros for an information package and application at PH: (780) 427-6949, Toll Free: 1-800-661-4551, Fax: (780) 457-2092, or email: ivy.spros@ualberta.ca.

Conversations in Dissemination

On May 5th 5th 6th and 6th 6th 7th from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm, the Centre is hosting the 1st Annual Alberta Public Health Association conference, a meeting of the province’s top researchers and practitioners. This conference, in partnership with the Public Health and Community Medicine, is an opportunity to discuss the health of Albertans and the future of health care in Alberta.

Copies will be available on loan from the Resource Library. For further information contact Marie Carson at PH: (780) 427-7816, Toll Free: 1-800-661-4551, or email: marie.carson@ualberta.ca.

Older Adult Physical Activity Video in Production

Coming this November will be a 23 minute documentary video. Produced by the ACWF, the video will feature stories about the successes and challenges faced by physically active older adults. Together with the video, the ACWF will also producing a manual with an examination of the issues raised within a determinants of health perspective. For further information contact Jennifer Turinette at PH: (780) 427-7938, Toll Free: 1-800-661-4551, or email: jennifer.turinette@ualberta.ca.

Health In Action Older Adult Webpage

The Health In Action website offers a comprehensive source of information about older adults. The Older Adult theme page may be found at: health-in-action.org/older_adult. It provides resources and tools for use in the planning of health promotion programs for older adults. It also includes articles, reports, research findings, directories, program listings and links to related sites together with an online discussion news group where visitors can ask and answer questions or share stories from their own experience.

If you have success stories, resources to share, or require further information please contact Susan MacMillan at PH: (780) 439-2580 or email: susanmac@planet.net or Gwen Farnsworth at PH: (780) 427-7938 or email: gwen.farnswortho@psl.ualberta.ca.

Research Report Released

The ACWF recently released a research report on the Availability of Physical Activity Programs in Alberta Containing Care Facilities. As the older adult population increases in proportion to other age groups, it will be important to address their physical activity needs to help offset the medical conditions that may arise from sedentary living. The report gives a much-needed picture of the range and availability of physical activity programs in Alberta containing care facilities as well as making recommendations for future directions. The report is available on the web at: www.health-in-action.org/well-being/research/availability_of_physical_activity_centres.htm, by contacting Felicia Taylor in the Resource Library at PH: (780) 427-7932, Toll Free: 1-800-661-4551, or email: felicia.taylor@ualberta.ca.

WellSpring

The Centre welcomes Gloria Klingen who has assumed the new position of Human Resource Coordinator for the Alberta Centre for Well-Being and the Provincial Fitness Unit. Gloria is responsible for providing administrative support for our human resource, information, and financial systems.

Congratulations to Barry and Dayla on the birth of their son Alex. Barry is currently on maternity leave from the Centre.

Congratulations also to Ivy Spros who recently married and is now Ivy Spros, and to Pauline Poon also a newly wed.
Older Adult Resources

Sources for resources: Contact the following companies for a free catalogue of their products.

Venture Publishing
199 Cato Avenue
State College, Pennsylvania
USA 16901-3238
Ph: (814) 234-5500
Fax: (814) 234-1651
Email: pubsinfo@venturepublish.com
Website: www.venturepublish.com

Venture offers numerous publications on recreation programming for the elderly, including those in long-term care facilities. The ACWFB resource library currently has available for loan three titles from Venture: Getting People Involved in Leisure and Activities: Effective Motivating Techniques, More Than a Game: A New Focus on Senior Activity Services, and Recreation Programming and Activities for Older Adults.

Human Kinetics
475 Devonshire Road, Unit 100
Windsor, ON, N8Y 2J5
Toll-free: 1-800-465-7301
Fax: (519) 971-9797
Email: info@humankinetics.com
Website: www.humankinetics.com

In-depth reference texts as well as program manuals are available through Human Kinetics. The Resource Library's holdings include Aging, Physical Activity, and Health by Ray Shepard and Exercise for Older Adults: ACE Guide for Fitness Professionals.

Reactive
R. B., 512 Ser 22, Comp 24
Gibbons, BC, VON 1V0
Ph: (604) 885-2322
Fax: (604) 885-4337
Email: reactive@reactivate.com
Website: www.activetodaycanada.com

Reactive is a small company run by Lorraine Gibson, an experienced recreation professional. She sells a variety of exercise kits, exercise props, videos, and programming guides developed in Canada and the US for recreation therapists and activity coordinators working in long-term care facilities.

Video Sources

The following websites offer a wide selection of exercise videos for the already active older adult as well as those with limited mobility.

www.fitnessonline.com - allows browsing to select videos based on their fitness level.
www.celebrigranden.com - includes descriptions and samples taken by experienced users of the videos and a toll-free number (1-800-433-6709) to order a print catalogue.
www.standupandwalk.com - a series of gentle exercise programs (developed by a registered nurse and certified fitness instructor) that are intended for seniors and people with physical limitations.
www.fitnessforever.com - a nationally recognized and medically designed exercise program to improve the health and fitness of seniors that meets the American College of Sports Medicine and the World Health Organization's new exercise guidelines for older adults.

www.genfisiolinux.com - a 90-minute therapeutic video, developed by a team of health care professionals, that combines basic exercise science principles and healing techniques. Recommended by the Mayo Clinic and John Hopkins University Hospital. (Can also be ordered by calling toll-free: 1-888-453-3956).

www.waw.catalyst - The Home Support Exercise video, developed by The Centre for Activity and Aging at the University of Western Ontario includes demonstrations, by seniors themselves, of exercises that can be done in one's immediate surroundings in order to improve and maintain functional mobility and independence.

www.scienceactivity.tv - Science in Action video, Moving to Live, is available from the Canadian Public Health Association in Ottawa. Check their health resource centre catalogue on the website or Ph: (613) 725-3769.

Other Sources of Information

Creative Forecasting - a monthly periodical for recreation professionals working in seniors' residences that provides a wealth of activity and craft ideas (complete with reproducible artwork).
Contact Creative Forecasting Inc. at: Ph: (719) 633-3174 or Email: cff@mustang.com for a one year subscription $48 US.

Mature Fitness Magazine - formerly known as the Senior Fitness Bulletin, this newsletter is published by the American Senior Fitness Association and is intended for exercise professionals working with older adults or physically restricted people. Contents include research updates, reports, resource reviews and practical applications (available in the US & Canada) and a list of their publications, see: http://members.ucf.edu/fafmas/

The Centre for Study of Aging, in Baltimore, New York, is a non-profit foundation known internationally for its research, development, education and training programs in aging, longevity, prevention, health and fitness. For more information on their extensive information and referral services (available in the US & Canada) and a list of their publications, see: http://members.ucf.edu/fafmas/

Recent Acquisitions

Northcott, Herbert C., Aging in Alberta: Rhetoric and Reality. Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises, 1997. Although not specifically about physical activity, this book is must background reading for anyone involved in senior programming in this province. Dr. Northcott makes use of recent demographic facts and statistics in his analysis, along with a discussion of provincial government developments, to provide a current and realistic profile of the aging population in Alberta.

Exercise: A Guide from the National Institute on Aging and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 1999. The National Institute on Aging (part of the National Institutes of Health) and the Life Sciences Division of NASA, brought together some of the best-informed experts on exercise for older adults, to collaboratively produce this informative and user-friendly guide for seniors.

It covers the benefits of physical activity, safety precautions, how to stay motivated, and recomended amounts and types of exercises (complete with clear instructions and diagrams). The document can be viewed and/or printed from the website: http://www.lhsc.on.ca/geriatrics/exercisingaging or a paperback copy can be ordered free of charge by Email: niaging@lhc.on.ca.


In her ongoing efforts to impress upon health care professionals and policy makers the importance of active living for seniors, Dr. O'Brien Cousins has recently authored two important reference books.

The first presents in detail the studies to date that indicate physical activity has a positive effect on physical health, disease prevention, psychosocial attitudes, lifestyle behaviour and economic well-being.

In the second text, she examines the various factors that influence the activity patterns of older adults. A summary of the scientific evidence regarding the benefits and known risks of exercise among the elderly is presented, followed by a discussion of theories regarding older adult physical activity behaviour patterns and considerations as to why seniors are reluctant to participate in regular physical activity.

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Canadian Association on Gerontology Conference 4-7, 1999, Ottawa, ON, The Dawn of a New Era: Aging Challenges for Boomers. This multi-disciplinary scientific and educational program includes symposia, workshops, and round tables in all areas of focus in gerontology. Contact the Canadian Association on Gerontology, Ph: (513) 728-9347, Fax: (513) 728-8913, Email: cag@magi.net, Website: www.cag.org:

Designing Community Health Conference
November 18-19, 1999, Edmonton, AB

Hosted by the Capital Health Authority. An opportunity to hear about the process of developing partnerships and strategic alliances, and how it applies in the health care system. Examples of partnerships which promote coordination and collaboration, and lead to improved services and health status of the population will be profiled in the concurrent sessions.

Contact: Margaret Bubay, Conference Coordinator, Ph: (780) 413-5125, Fax: (780) 413-5126, Email: mbubay@vchal.ab.ca

If you would like to post on educational information, please contact Felicia Taylor, Ph: (780) 427-7892, Fax: (780) 435-2092, Email: felicia.taylor@ualberta.ca

Calendar of Events

Alberta Recreation and Parks Association Conference '99
October 24-26, 1999. Jasper, AB
'Round the Valley'. This three-day event offers a great mix of recreation, discussion and fun. Delegates will be treated to a wonderful experience where workshops will addressRotation: Page 1 of 2

Health, Work & Wellness Conference
October 24-27, 1999
Vancouver, BC
Canadas 3rd Annual. For more information, call (604) 395-1800. Enrol: workwell@healthworkandwellness.com or http://www.healthworkandwellness.com

Health and the Quality of Life
October 31-November 5, 1999
Montreal, QC
3rd Conference of Local Health Authorities of the Americas in Partnership with the Annual Public Health Days of Quebec 1999. Local issues in the context of globalization. Contact Secretariat de la 3e Congres des responsables locaux de sante des Ameriques, 938, rue St-Maurice, Montreal, QC, H3C 1L7, Ph: (514) 395-1800, Fax: (514) 395-1801, Email: web: www.mscs.gouv.qc.ca/congres_guerqe

Safe Communities Conference
November 4-5, 1999
Medicine Hat, AB
A two day conference addressing making communities safer places to live, learn, work and play. The Medicine Hat Centre for Injury Control and Research, the Safe Communities Medicine Hat & Area Foundation are working together to present this conference.

Contact: 398 Abeldon Street, S.E., Medicine Hat, AB, T1A 0R2.
Ph: (403) 527-6386, Fax: (403) 527-6574, Email: safecomm@telus.net

Canadian Association on Gerontology Conference 4-7, 1999, Ottawa, ON, The Dawn of a New Era: Aging Challenges for Boomers. This multi-disciplinary scientific and educational program includes symposia, workshops, and round tables in all areas of focus in gerontology. Contact the Canadian Association on Gerontology, Ph: (513) 728-9347, Fax: (513) 728-8913, Email: cag@magi.net, Website: www.cag.org