

Improving quality of life for seniors

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We all know that health is fundamental to quality of life for seniors.

Health specifics such as income and social status, social support networks, education and working conditions have cumulative effects on health and well-being in later life. When the determinants of health are positive throughout life, seniors spend more years as “young old” and “middle old” and few years in the “frail old” stage of life.

We as seniors are not only living longer, but we are living longer in good health. Recognizing that aging is often associated with physical and mental decline, we have to look for options for building health, activity and fulfillment in our senior years.

Health promotion initiatives, such as nutrition and physical activity programs reduce many risks associated with aging.

One important issue for health promotion for seniors is falls and injury prevention. Injuries from falls as I have said many times have a disastrous effect on the health and well-being of seniors. Statistics show that falls are responsible for more than 80 per cent of injury related hospital admissions and 40 per cent of admissions to nursing homes or long-term care facilities. Physical weakness and hazards in the environment are the principal risk factors for falls.

Falls can also be associated with the use of certain medications. The chronic conditions associated with aging require a variety of medications, each with potential side effects and possible negative interactions.

Studies have shown that between 18 and 50 per cent of drugs taken by seniors are not used appropriately. The cost of medications is also a concern for us living on fixed incomes. Prescription drug insurance varies significantly, leaving many seniors vulnerable to financial hardship.

An idea would be recognizing that the cost of prescription drugs has risen in recent years and a national plan would ensure equitable access to medically necessary medications regardless of ability to pay.

Good health is the role of good nutrition. Seniors can prevent or at least control the higher rates of high cholesterol and high blood pressure associated with aging through healthy eating and regular physical activity.

Barriers that can prevent seniors from maintaining a healthy diet include lack of dental care and the cost of food. Because dental care and dentures may not be publicly funded through the health care system, some seniors cannot eat properly; therefore, we should ensure that seniors have access to dental care programs to include dentures when needed, as a first step to promoting proper nutrition.

Seniors are encouraged to continue physical activity and eat well nutritionally—but just as important if

not No. 1 in importance is social contact. If that is lacking, then you see a lessening of activity and of course lack of interest in cooking.

Healthy aging is not just about an absence of illness, but is strongly related to the strength of social networks supporting seniors. The level of social care provided through community and family is important to health. This social interaction is alive and flourishing in Richmond.

This week, many seniors throughout Richmond have attended Activate. Activate Wellness Fair is an annual opportunity for seniors to see what's new to protect and improve all aspects of personal health and wellness. There was something to catch your interest, perhaps the more than 30 vendors promoting their products to alleviate seniors' problems/issues.

The Wellness Clinic offers free blood pressure monitoring (Wellness Clinics are now held monthly in seven different venues throughout Richmond). Check with Carolyn Brandly, 604-718-8460 for more information, dates, times and available treatments.

If this is your first introduction to the Minoru Place Activity Centre with all the programs available to seniors, it is our hope that you will revisit the centre and enjoy the companionship that exists throughout this centre and the many other community centres in Richmond.

The games tournament, tea dance, and general socializing made this National Seniors Week Celebrations a week to remember with joy. As our mayor commented "Our healthy seniors population is an important contributor to Richmond being the healthiest City in Canada."

Aileen Cormack writes about seniors issues every month in The Richmond Review.

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