

Partnership Brings Timely Diagnosis and Support

Primary Health Care Integrated Geriatric Services Initiative

Adele* often wonders when she first noticed symptoms of dementia in her husband, Jim*.

Even seven years ago, the successful entrepreneur went back to the Peavey Mart six times because he repeatedly forgot items he needed for his home project. Jim retired five years ago. He drove his car off the road a year later, got tested and was diagnosed with early symptoms of dementia. Unbeknownst to Adele, Jim cancelled his follow-up examination.

Partnership helps community

Although his doctor couldn't detect further cognitive decline, Adele was concerned by Jim's growing forgetfulness when he wasn't in the doctor's office. She shared those concerns with Sherrilyn Lavoie, Chronic Disease Management Nurse in Westlock.

Coordinating with the family doctor, Sherrilyn arranged for an assessment with the Westlock Health Centre's partner, Dr. Darryl Rolfson, professor and specialist in Geriatric Medicine at the University of Alberta. The partnership is part of the Primary Health Care Integrated Geriatric Services Initiative (PHC IGSI). PHC IGSI is a provincial initiative which supports local primary health care teams in advancing priorities aimed at improving ongoing care and supports for those living in their community with cognitive impairment or dementia.

"The community-clinical partnerships, encouraged under PHC IGSI are crucial in developing healthy and thriving communities that are inclusive of the needs of older adults that live with frailty," Dr. Rolfson says. That's especially important in Westlock. In March 2017, more than 19.5 percent of the 10,000 residents in the community and outlying area were 65 years old or older.

Dr. Rolfson has held 12 day clinics in Westlock since the partnership began in 2018; he also mentors local family physicians to conduct assessments, and he's training a local doctor so she can complete her geriatric GP designation.

"Those are huge assets for the community," Sherrilyn says. "We're increasing our capacity locally, decreasing the wait list and providing more timely access to diagnosis. Assessments and diagnoses are happening on a more frequent basis."

Working group improves lives of frail seniors



Sherrilyn chairs a working group to make Westlock a Dementia Friendly Community, collaborating with several community organizations, including the Aspen Primary Care Network, Westlock Public Library and the Alliance Church. Through that initiative, Westlock hosted well attended Alzheimer's awareness sessions during Senior's Week in June, with guest speakers and special events, including an open house in the Westlock Adult Day Centre in the town's continuing care facility.

"The energy and enthusiasm of our community is key to how we continue to grow this," Sherrilyn says. "It's all about coalition building, which takes a lot of time and the right people."

Adele is testimony to the success of local efforts. She took COMPASS for the Caregiver training - a program offered by Caregivers Alberta, to help her with the challenges of caregiving. She enjoys volunteering at the monthly supper club for people living with dementia and their caregivers, made possible by a government grant secured by the working committee. It offers dinner, entertainment and a chance to socialize for people with dementia, who often feel isolated.

"I've met wonderful people," Adele says. She has also enrolled Jim in a twice-weekly adult day program in Westlock.

"Jim loves it and it gives me a break, too," Adele says.

*Not their real names.

Community partners

- Westlock Health Centre
- Aspen PCN
- Dr. Darryl Rolfson, professor and specialist in Geriatric Medicine at the University of Alberta
- Public Library
- Alliance Church
- Alzheimer's Society
- Compass for Caregivers
- Westlock Seniors/Dementia Friendly Community working group members
- Westlock Continuing Care Facility