

SENIORS HOUSING BY ART KUBE, 1ST VICE-PRESIDENT

PUTTING SENIORS HOUSING IN CONTEXT

First let me put the issue of seniors' housing in its proper context. The vast majority of seniors want to live independently for as long as possible. They want to participate in housing and care choices at all stages of life based on need and preference, regardless of their ability to pay. These choices reflect a sense of dignity and self worth, and keep seniors happier and healthier. They allow us to continue to participate as members of the community and as full citizens. Equally important is the fact that they allow us to exercise patriarchal and matriarchal responsibilities for as long as possible. Happiness for seniors involves cherished memories of the family home, a place where sons, daughters and grandchildren are made welcome. Here we seniors feel safe and comfortable knowing the neighbours and the neighbourhood. Because the family home or the primary residence is so important, the governments should strengthen programs and policies which allow seniors to stay in their primary residence for as long as possible. The area which needs more emphasis is home support, which has unfortunately been severely cut back. In addition, affordable seniors' housing is in very short supply. Indications, born out with the drastic drop in the savings rate are, that in the future seniors' disposable income will be shrinking and that seniors will be compelled to downsize for economic reasons and there will be an even greater need for seniors' rental housing for independent living.

UTILIZATION OF PRESENT HOUSING STOCK

The emphasis these days is on new housing for seniors. I recognize that there is some need for additional senior's rental housing, but I think that a greater emphasis should be on the utilization of present housing stock. Retirement planning must include housing options along with health care and income planning so that all avenues can be properly explored and the pitfalls in housing choices prevented. There are a good number of options available, such as sharing housing with other seniors and family members. However all these options require careful consideration as to the compatibility of the people sharing such housing. The whole question of making a house, its appliances and furniture safe for its aging occupants deserves full consideration before people actually retire. In planning the whole field of seniors housing, the primary aim has to be independence, health maintenance, sickness prevention and a high quality of life. Assisted-living housing often smacks of seniors' warehousing and promotes dependency, with little or no thought to community participation or activities.

HOME SUPPORT/ HOMECARE – A LESSON FROM DENMARK

Our organization promotes "SENIORS HELPING SENIORS". Members volunteer for Meals on Wheels programs, staff the Seniors' Minor Home Repair program and the Wellness Day programs, which are all designed to allow seniors to stay in their homes for as long as possible. It should become public policy to support such programs so they can serve even more seniors. We would recommend for your perusal an article in the Gerontologist Vol.41, No.4, 474-480 entitled "Home-and Community-Based Long-Term Care: Lesson from Denmark" which shows priority for a home support policy over

institutional care. The results show an improved quality of life for seniors and are also much easier on the public purse. Denmark has not built a single seniors' care facility in the last six years because its emphasis is on home support and home care. Communities provided free home support and home care to all seniors whenever required.

AGING IN THE COMMUNITY

Seniors recognize that not all the elderly are lucky enough or healthy enough to live in their family residence, but must, out of necessity, go into seniors' housing, assisted living or a complex-care facility. Here again we are missing the preventive health care concept of: "Aging in the Community", to which only lip service is paid. We have some horror stories brought on by the closing and privatization of seniors' residential care facilities, with real health consequences for seniors. These public facilities have been replaced with predominantly private low-grade assisted-living facilities which are frequently built outside city centres away from recreation and service facilities, keeping their residents isolated. Private Assisted Living facilities serve those who can afford them, but can evict those with medical, physical or behavioural problems, who are forced in many instances to accept placement outside of the senior's own community. We would recommend as a policy, community based integrated seniors' residential and day care facilities, preferably public or at least non-profit.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

With the changing demographics it becomes much more important to allow for as much self-reliance by seniors as possible, not only for the purpose of maintaining the quality of life but also to reduce intake into complex-care and acute-care facilities, which with present projections will become budget wise hard to sustain. It would be wise to pilot a model of "Aging in the Community" and establish a comprehensive home care and home support model in one community based on the Danish model. Some legitimate questions are being raised suggesting we provide more outreach programs like adult daycare, holistic health programs or a facility for restive care, rather than provide more housing.

PUBLIC, PRIVATE OR NON-PROFIT

First and foremost I advocate public or non-profit seniors' housing over private for-profit seniors' housing where the bottom line is the maximizing of profits with no public accountability. The construction and location is determined by minimum capital costs, and no thought is given to tenant mobility or participation in community activities. The governance of public and non-profit seniors housing has public accountability and its prime motive is service. Even in historical terms non-profit has communal grounding when it comes to volunteers and voluntary dollars. Some of the most caring forms of all forms of seniors' housing have been and are provided by community based organizations, sponsored by the different ethnic groups, religious orders, service organizations and the provincial and federal government.

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