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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Baby Boomers Changing Healthcare

It is decision time for Canada when it comes to our health care system. Since the 1960's, it has always been something Canadians were proud of. It was a system that provided an excellent level of care to all citizens, regardless of financial means.

The healthcare costs for an average person under the age of 20 is very little. This continues to increase slightly from age 30 until age 40. The costs then skyrocket after age 60. In the years 1947 to 1966, a massive population growth occurred in North America. People born in this era have been labeled "baby boomers". They are more educated, have more disposable income, and question authority more than any generation ever has. An ever-increasing number of people in this generation are now reaching that golden age of 50 to 60. This means that the healthcare costs to keep these people healthy has also increased dramatically. Because the government has no extra money to compensate, the Canadian health care system as it is currently structured can no longer offer the excellent care it used to. Signs that the existing system is failing are already present.

In response to the shortcomings in our healthcare system, these baby boomers are acting like consumers shopping for a new car. On their own, they survey what is available on the healthcare market and determine what is best for them. They then pursue that form of care even if it will cost them money out of their own pocket. The following examples demonstrate how this trend is growing rapidly. The percentage of the population that uses alternative or complementary therapies (chiropractic, massage therapy, acupuncture, etc) has increased from 34% in 1990 to 42% in 1997. This has continued to grow over the last four years. The total number visits to alternative or complementary practitioners were 427 million in 1990. This increased to 629 million in 1997. It was interesting to note that in 1997 there were more visits to the alternative or complementary practitioners than to medical doctors. That is an amazing change.

When questioned, these baby boomers claim that one of the main reasons they are seeking other forms of care is because the medical system is stuck in a "sickness care" model. This means that treatment is given only when a person is already sick, rather than spending time and resources on prevention of the disease in the first place. These baby boomers want to have control and play a more active role in their health. Because this

generation is so influential financially and politically, the trends they are creating are here to stay. I just hope the system is able to keep up with these rapid changes.