

Plenty of health tips offered at Tilson's Seniors' Expo

By Bill Rea

There was lots of useful information, especially related to health, to come out of the latest Seniors' Expo.

It was hosted recently at St. James' Anglican Church in Caledon East by Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson and the Caledon Seniors' Council.

"Today, we heard outstanding presentations on a wide range of topics of importance to the local senior community, given by experts in their respective fields," Tilson said. "I'm sure each attendee took away something valuable that will prove to be helpful. I would also like to thank the Caledon Seniors' Council for working with my office to deliver this annual event to the community for the ninth year."

Those attending the Expo heard from Phil Lian H. Sun of Caledon East Guardian Pharmacy, who spoke about some of the complications that can result from medications seniors take.

He pointed out that as people get older, they have more health issues, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, etc. That can lead to more drugs being prescribed, with more chances for those medications interacting with each other. He also observed that drugs need to travel throughout the body to be properly distributed, so if those pathways are disrupted, there can be side effects. Changes to the thyroid can slow down the metabolism, while conditions like diabetes can affect the flow of blood and affect the distribution of drugs.

In women, he said menopause creates certain conditions that slow down the metabolism.

Seniors often have to deal with loss of bone mass. In the event of a fall, there is a greater risk breaking a bone, like a hip or vertebrae, and it can take longer to recover.

Sun said changes to the brain affect some 44 million people world wide, and he said the strength the body's immune system decreases as people age.

He also said seniors should make sure they get their flu shots, as well as shots for shingles and pneumonia

Sun stressed the possibility of heart attacks or strokes increase with age, and in such cases, people need to get to the hospital as fast as possible. These things can be treated, but if there's too much of a delay, the damage can be very serious.

He also observed that the liver shrinks with age, impacting on the body's ability to absorb water. The function of the kidneys is a concern too. He commented that an 85-year-old kidney has about half the capacity of a 35-year-old one.

Sun also spoke about a list that was compiled by Dr. Mark Beers, which specified several groups of medications that cause harm in elderly patients. He said that has impacted on the prescribing habits.

Trudy Mulder-Hall spoke of many of the services and programs run through the Central West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN).

The aim of many of these programs is to help people remain at home, where they want to be, for as long as possible, and to help with the transition to long-term care while avoiding trips to hospital emergency rooms.

She said care co-ordination is a key part of this. It involves assessing the needs of the individual and creating a specialized care plan. She added these plans are monitored and reassessed regularly.

Anika Cai, of Lifestyle Hearing and Helix Hearing Care in Bolton, spoke about the modern technology of hearing aids.

"More people have hearing loss, actually, than vision loss," she remarked, adding about half of people older than 65 have some hearing loss.

She also commented that the average person waits about seven years after noticing hearing difficulties before seeking help.

"We're happy to shorten that gap a little bit," she said.

Cai observed that people are social creatures who depend on their ability to hear for interaction, as well as in terms of safety. She pointed out there could be problems for a person who's driving and can't hear an approaching siren. There are also hazards for a person who can't hear it when a fire alarm goes off.

She said people older than 65 should include hearing evaluation as part of their annual medical checks. The sooner that starts, the more possible it is to evaluate hearing changes over time.

As well, she said there are variations to the way hearing changes for some people. Various pitches might be hard for some to pick up, while other might have trouble hearing certain consonants or vowels.

Signs of possible hearing issues, she said, include often asking people to repeat themselves, a perception that people mumble, having trouble following conversations in groups, needing to turn up the volume on the TV, etc. In a lot of these cases, the situation can be improved with the use of hearing aids.

Cai said such improvements can lead to better relationships, more self-esteem and better health overall. Family members report improvement too, since communication runs two ways, and both sides feel frustration is there are hearing issues.

Georgetown resident Ernest Kolenda spoke on behalf of MPowered disAbility Corporation.

MPowered helps assess what people with disabilities can and can't do, and helps provide tools to connect them with services to assist them.

Kolenda has multiple sclerosis, meaning he can't do things like walk through a park. He said even shaking hands can sometimes be a problem.

He said he has been married for 33 years and has three children. The team of family and care givers helps give disabled people the strength to carry on.

Kolenda had led a very active life until he was diagnosed, and it took about three years to actually determine what the problem was.

But his life got busy again.

?It's what I can and cannot do that helped me go through my every-day life,? he said.



Those taking part in the Seniors' Information Expo hosted by Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson included Anika Cai of Lifestyle Hearing and Helix Hearing Care; Caledon Seniors' Council President Alex Rodrigues; Vice-President Harvey Rutter; Ernest Kolenda of MPowered disAbility Corporation; Tilson; Trudy Mulder-Hall of the Central West LHIN and Central West Palliative Care Network; and Phil Lian H. Sun of Caledon East Guardian Pharmacy. Submitted photo