

Doctors of BC supports family caregivers

VANCOUVER, BC – For many adults with chronic illness or disabilities, the majority of their day-to-day health care is provided not by a health care professional, but rather by a family member or friend. Often referred to as “family caregivers,” these unpaid caregivers are an integral, yet often invisible, part of British Columbia’s health care system.

In its new policy paper *Circle of Care: Supporting Family Caregivers in BC*, Doctors of BC makes a number of commitments and recommendations aimed to recognize, include, and support family caregivers as partners in care.

“Support from family caregivers often enables patients to remain at home for longer, contributing to a higher quality of life for patients,” says Dr Romyne Gallagher, Chair of Doctors of BC’s Geriatrics and Palliative Care Committee. “However, caregiving responsibilities are stressful. This can cause caregivers to be more susceptible to physical and mental burnout, and can lead to a decrease in the quality of life for both caregivers themselves and the person they are caring for.”

Research shows that family caregivers provide between 70%-75% of care for people receiving home care in Canada. In BC, the majority of these individuals are caring for a chronically ill or disabled senior. By delaying or reducing the time these patients would otherwise spend in hospital or long-term care facilities, these family caregivers lessen the burden on an already overburdened system, and save the health care system money. However, statistics show that close to one-third of these family caregivers are under distress themselves. If left unaddressed, burned out family caregivers could potentially contribute to poorer health outcomes for patients and for themselves, adding to the already high demand on hospitals and long-term care services.

“With BC’s aging population, the prevalence of unpaid family caregiving in the province is expected to grow,” says Doctors of BC President, Dr Alan Ruddiman. “Doctors of BC is committed to developing practical resources to help physicians identify and engage with caregivers, as well as to working with government and other partners to develop and implement a health care strategy that sees family caregivers as recognized partners in care.” Dr Ruddiman adds that, “only then can the appropriate recognition, resources, and incentives be created to fully support family caregivers in our province.”

As part of its policy paper, Doctors of BC developed a physician resource guide designed to help physicians include family caregivers as partners in care, and to enhance supports for caregivers themselves. The resource guide provides practical suggestions on:

- Identifying caregivers
- Involving caregivers in patient care
- Monitoring the health of caregivers
- Providing information and support to caregivers

More information can be found on the Doctors of BC website: <https://www.doctorsofbc.ca/working-change/health-policy/policy-papers>.

For more information:

Sharon Shore, Senior Manager of Communications and Media Relations
604-638-2832; 604-306-1866 (pager)