

CURAC ANNUAL CONFERENCE - MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY ST JOHN'S NEWFOUNDLAND,

JUNE 12-14th, 2013

Thanks to the support of Peter Ricketts (V.P. Academic) I was able to represent the Carleton University Retirees' Association at this meeting. The conference was hosted by the Memorial University Pensioners' Association (MUNPA) whose annual meeting was held in conjunction with the CURAC conference and AGM. Some 25 retiree associations from across Canada were represented (approx. 40 delegates) – all from English-speaking universities and colleges.

Thursday Morning Sessions: The morning sessions (hosted by MUNPA) featured two notable Newfoundland actor-writers. Andy Jones presented a series of stories entitled, *"How to Catch Rabbits in Wintertime"*. Greg Malone gave a talk based on his new book, *"Don't Tell the Newfoundlanders"*. The latter is a history of the events leading up to the closely-contested Newfoundland referendum and decision to enter confederation with Canada. His thesis is that there was a done deal between Britain and Canada to keep the US out and that the referendum was a rigged piece of window-dressing in which the Newfoundlanders had minimal input. (There is a Carleton connection in that the main "eminence grise" on the Canadian side was Norman Robertson.)

Elder Abuse and the Nursing Home: A Critical Interface, Roger Butler, Memorial Dept. of Family Medicine

This was a rather depressing presentation on a rising problem that has been much in the news of late. Elder abuse is following the same trajectory as child abuse – something that was rarely spoken of, or prosecuted until recently. Abuse can take many forms, from physical to psychological to financial. It can take the form of active abuse or passive neglect. Those most at risk are females suffering from dementia living in nursing homes and suffering from social isolation from their relatives. The average age of victims is 85 and 90% have some form of cognitive decline. One in 85 people alive suffers from cognitive impairment and the number is doubling every 10 years. The rising tide of Alzheimers is staggering. By 2050 there will be 100 million cases worldwide with 200 million people looking after them.

Newfoundland is a laboratory for the rest of Canada. It is the jurisdiction with the oldest population and is set to be the oldest on the planet outside Japan by 2038. Canada as a whole will have 8 million people over the age of 65 by 2031 and the rates of elder abuse are likely to rise. There are many causes of abuse, amongst them: ageism, caregiver burnout, poor training for nursing and medical staff, high staff turnover, reliance on temporary workers and poor working conditions. Nursing homes place too much reliance on anti-psychotic drugs and sedatives, when other approaches are often more effective. Doctors are not well trained to recognize abuse and are loath to get involved, especially as family doctors in small communities

where they have to be in regular contact with the abuser. The legal system needs to place more emphasis on this problem. There should be mandatory reporting of abuse as well as more required inspections of long-term care facilities. An example is the Adult Protection Act coming in Newfoundland. Ontario does not have any such legislation.

There is a need for better training for doctors and other health care professionals, a greater need for medical professionals to work in teams and a greater emphasis on the problem amongst managers in nursing homes. The key to preventing abuse by the caregiver is to provide proper support for that caregiver.

CURAC AGM

This was the 10th anniversary of CURAC and there was some discussion of the history of the association. It grew out of an idea started at Regina in 1994 and has been variously associated with the “Learners” and with CAUT over the years. The founding conference took place at Dalhousie in 2003 – the same year as the US-based AROHE. Since its founding the association has doubled the number of member organisations.

CURAC is a registered non-profit operating under federal law. As the law has recently been changed, it was necessary at this AGM to amend the constitution and refile to retain our status. The necessary motions were passed unanimously. A new executive was voted in with Sandra Pyke of York elected as President. The usual AGM documents and committee reports were tabled. The organisation is in good health. For more information see the CURAC website at www.curac.ca.

Future of CURAC

Peter Russell (U. of T. 1958 – 1996) presented some reminiscences on the history of CURAC. He was the first president and is still active in the organisation.

John Meyer (Past-President from Windsor) offered his perspective on the present state and future direction of the association. He presented some statistics from CARP. 14% of Canadians are now over 65 and the proportion is growing. 20% are working FT or PT and 10% are volunteering. Their biggest concerns are related to health and finances. (0% of seniors are in good health but there are only 240 geriatric specialists in all of Canada. More seniors are retiring with significant debt and the age of retirement is rising. Many retirees are caught between care of very old parents and grandchildren – the new sandwich generation! CURAC member associations are getting larger and more self-sufficient as institutions mature, changing the demands on CURAC at the national level. CURAC needs to focus on issues of truly universal relevance, e.g. pensions and health care and avoid issues where we can have little influence. To be effective CURAC has to develop better partnerships with organisations like CARP, CAUT,

AROHE etc.) There is a need for increased visibility and for greater outreach to non-academic retirees as well as for more college members. Perhaps CURAC needs to raise dues enough to hire a part-time staff person to increase its effectiveness.

Regional Conferences

There has been an annual series of 6 one-day regional CURAC conferences in the Atlantic Region, regular meetings between the 3 “senior” BC university associations and one regional conference in Ontario (Toronto 2012. See notes from Bob Morrison on CURA website). These meetings address more focussed local issues and allow more people to attend, given shorter travelling distances and lower costs. There is an ongoing debate about how often the regional and national meetings should be held. Some suggest an alternating biennial schedule, while others insist on the need for an annual national meeting and AGM.

The recent Ontario meeting, organised by Doug Creelman, used the Drummond Report as a focus and consisted of a series of roundtable discussions which maximized participant involvement. There was good attendance from Ontario institutions, including many colleges. It was proposed to repeat the Ontario conference, ***possibly in Ottawa late in 2013.***

Sharing Best Practices

Activities of retiree associations can be grouped under the headings: *Social* (newsletters, awards, retirement centres, etc); *Educational* (pre-retirement seminars, invited speaker events, life-long learning programs, research opportunities, historical/archival activities); *Outreach* (volunteer groups, public relations, mentorship, services in institutional governance, tutoring students, supporting scholarships and awards); *Advocacy* (internal and external advocacy to protect/improve benefits, lobby for health care etc., partnerships with larger bodies such as CARP and CAUT) and *Added Value* (modest funding for professional activities, website, improved representation, database for temporary employment by the institution, database for ambassadors for university Development Office)

Barbara Cox (MUNPA) talked about their organisation. MUNPA is all-inclusive with automatic membership to all retirees (currently around 1,600). There is a voluntary membership fee of \$2/month (which 65% support) with the university agreeing to deduct the fee from members’ pensions. This results in a \$16,000/ year budget, which is enough to support a part-time staff person. The main product is a monthly newsletter and website. There is an annual AGM, which is largely social. They have an MOU with the university and are supported with office space, computers, email, etc. They have a “home department”, which is the HR Department and hold regular meetings with senior administration. They appoint liaison positions with all the unions. One thing that is very successful is an annual “Tribute Awards” night recognizing the various

achievements of MUN retirees hosted by the university. The President of MUNPA is invited to official events, such as convocation.

Patricia Stoll (Seneca College) talked about the differences between college and university retiree associations. Most colleges are newer and have a smaller number of retired teachers. Many college faculty members have a fairly loose relationship with their institution and break off contact upon retirement. There is a considerable difference between some of the smaller town colleges such as St Clair and the huge urban colleges like Seneca.

At St Clair, the retirees are very social and engage in many regular social activities including foreign travel. They are also involved in an ongoing history /archival project and maintain a substantial college art collection. At Seneca the retiree association receives strong support from the Development and Alumni Office including space, money and support staff. There is a one-time membership fee of \$30. It is largely a virtual organisation and retains contact through a well-developed website. The association is invited to attend a number of events such as the President's installation, building openings, etc. They are on the Board agenda annually to report. All meetings are held on campus – it is very important to retain on-campus visibility.

Retiree Benefits (Doug Creelman, Toronto) Doug presented the results of an online survey of 33 CURAC member organisations to compare benefits for retirees and their associations. These vary considerably between institutions and often between employee groups at the same institution. The detailed results of this survey will be available from the CURAC website. Notably 70% of associations get office space from their parent institution, 80% get Internet services, 10% get part-time staff paid by the university, 60% get some financial support and 45% have official recognition through an MOU or similar document.

Medical benefits for members vary greatly, as do their costs to the individual. Over 70% have dental coverage, while 30% get some long-term care benefits. Such benefits are under pressure across the country, especially in Quebec. Improvements to benefits, when these happen, are not always applied to existing retirees, but are “reverse-grandfathered”.

Pensions (Paul Huber, Dalhousie) Across the country and across all employers, pensions are getting poorer, with defined contribution plans becoming the norm. Much of this is in response to the recent track record of financial markets and the sometimes irrational valuation systems imposed on institutional plans by regulators. There is increasing pressure on employees to make larger contributions and for employers to have to make top-up payments into their pension plan. More employers are making increased use of contract and short-term employees with no pension benefits. 80% of employees across Canada have no pension plan and are not saving enough for their retirement. Many powerful interests (financial institutions as well as

employers and some large multi-employer pension plans) oppose improvements to the CPP and GIS. Existing pensioners are not immune from reductions to their existing pension benefits. The New Brunswick “shared risk” pension plan may be a bell-weather for others.

For more information on the conference consult the CURAC website (www.curac.ca) or contact the author.

David Holmes,

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