

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mini Med School series kicks off with session on memory loss and dementia

Chilliwack, BC- Memory loss and dementia, a major concern for our local elderly population, was the topic of discussion at the first in a series of four Mini Med School sessions, which kicked off on Tuesday, March 18. The Mini Med School is running for the 6th consecutive year and has had a promising start, with a turn-out of over 90 people for the first session. Family physicians, Drs. Chantal Chris and Melanie Madill, and Katrina Bepple, Programs Lead with the Chilliwack Division of Family Practice, introduced the audiences to the Division, including the background and preliminary data findings from A GP for Me, the Primary Care Clinic, and the Recruitment and Retention sub-committee's success in recruiting 5 physicians and 1 locum.

Following this brief introduction, Drs. Kate Slivko and Rory Thomson led an interactive and engaging presentation that shed light on statistics regarding dementia, the signs and symptoms of dementia, and the various stages it progresses through. Dr. Slivko revealed that dementia is the second most feared disease amongst Canadians, coming up just behind cancer. The doctors also explored the possibility of alternative treatments, such as aromatherapy, music, and massage, that have been shown to help, albeit to a limited extent. Additionally, discussion revolved around safety hazards at home for the elderly, and on the road, as well as the importance of maintaining a healthy diet and lifestyle habits to minimize the risk of dementia or to delay its onset. Rehabilitation techniques such as brain-training exercises, and social engagement to keep the mind agile were recommended. In other words, as Dr. Thomson put it, "we need to exercise our spirit" by staying in touch with friends and family, and possibly with support groups as well. Complementary to this, training with occupational therapists to improve motor skills in order to retain the basic abilities to perform everyday tasks was also considered important.

The doctors emphasized the key role that caregivers fulfill, having the greatest influence over patients. Caregiver burn-out was highlighted as a major concern; they are often exceptionally stressed, guilt-ridden and over-worked along with the complex emotional journey of watching their loved one's health and well-being decline. Given the burden of care placed on them, caring for caregivers emerged as a key theme in the presentation. Particularly useful to local residents was the list of Chilliwack resources that was presented; some of these include, first and foremost, your family physician, Alzheimer's Society of BC, and Home Health to name only a few. Chilliwack Community Services also provides programs, such as Better at Home and Meals on Wheels, that patients may benefit from. Finally, end-of-life planning was discussed; doctors drew attention to the importance of undertaking this planning early on to ensure that a patient's health, finances and personal wishes are executed as desired. If you're unsure of where to get started, the Alzheimer's Society of BC and your family physician would be able to provide resources to support end-of-life planning.

For more information, please contact Katrina Bepple

Programs Lead, Chilliwack Division of Family Practice

c. 604.845.5573

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