

For immediate release

Tapestry Foundation CEO impassioned by personal experience to improve quality of life for dementia patients and families

Alzheimer's disease, caregiving themes of Dialogue on Aging public presentation series

Vancouver, Oct. 11, 2011 – Imagine living in a world where your loved ones and friends are oftentimes alien to you, where you shift between planes of past memory and present reality, and find yourself trying to run away from the place you call home.

This is the world of a dementia patient.

Tapestry Foundation for Health Care CEO Ann Corrigan observed her mother living in that world for more than seven years before she passed away last February. That experience served to reinforce Corrigan's commitment to raising awareness and money to ease health challenges faced by seniors, including this devastating disease. Tapestry Foundation's Dialogue on Aging public presentation series – which launches Wednesday – has personal significance for her with its focus on Alzheimer's disease and caregiving.

As a first degree relative of a dementia patient, Corrigan is said to be four-to-five-times more likely to develop the disease. When she assumed leadership of Tapestry Foundation – an umbrella organization dedicated to raising funds for medical equipment, programs, services, education and research in the field of elder care for seven of 16 Providence Health Care facilities – Ann already had an understanding of dementia and other elder care issues. But it wasn't until her mother's diagnosis of vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease in 2004 that she personally experienced the full impact of this particular disease.

“My mom said that dementia is like having all your memories in a jar and then shaking that jar up. The memories are still in the jar but they're all jumbled up. Whatever memory drew prominence in the moment was her reality at that time,” said Corrigan.

“For example, there were times when I would arrive home on the weekend for a visit and my mom would be livid, demanding to know where I'd been. In that moment, she relived the time when I was a teenager still at home – that was her reality. I had to gently remind her that I lived in Vancouver,” said Corrigan.

Corrigan commuted at least every other weekend to her parents' Campbell River home, spelling off her father who served as primary caregiver during the week. During time spent with her mom, she learned that education and support are vital for caregivers, and that the little things make all the difference in improving the quality of life for dementia patients and the ones who look after them.

“It's critical that caregivers have easy and appropriate access to support and information about what to expect with the process of the disease. My dad was in his 70s when my mom was diagnosed. He didn't know where to go for information and it was difficult for him to find it because he was required to go online – something with which he wasn't familiar. You need to know who to ask. Information should be available in a wide variety of mediums and locations,” said Corrigan.

The entire family, including her brothers, rallied to engage her mom and maintain a semblance of normalcy, including what she described as “meaningful visits” after her mom went to a care facility in 2009. For example, they would gather for family luncheons in the facility's atrium outside the secured area, or take her home for tea or dinner or out for ice cream or a walk on the beach. “The social stimulus that family members and friends bring to patients in care facilities is significant. When I was there, I was unusual because I was there for long periods of time. Most family members would be there for an hour or less, some only once a month, some less. They didn't know how to have a good visit,” said Corrigan.

“The key is to ask – how can we make the visit more rewarding for everyone? It’s easy to lose patience when the patient is unable to interact. You don’t need to try to talk to her or him about some breaking news story. Just simple questions with yes or no answers such as do you like your green beans can be effective,” added Corrigan.

In addition to presenting the Dialogue on Aging series, Tapestry Foundation continues to support services and activities for dementia patients in care facilities such as:

- Renovation of a care unit in Youville Residence to create a calming environment for dementia patients – part of a study examining influences of environment and socialization;
- Pilot project exploring how the use of audio-visual technology – flat screen TVs displaying video images of the outside world – may stimulate and maintain the interest of highly cognitively impaired seniors;
- Symphony and chamber music performances at residential care facilities, giving residents a unique opportunity to hear live music – one they might not otherwise have.

Tapestry Foundation’s Dialogue on Aging presentation: “Alzheimer’s Disease: Can We Diagnose It Earlier and Modify Its Progression?” will be led by Dr. Serge Gauthier, MD, FRCPC, director, Alzheimer Disease Research Unit, McGill Centre for Studies in Aging, McGill University, Montreal. The session takes place Friday, Oct. 14 at the Vancouver Convention Centre’s East Building, 999 Canada Place. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Presentation starts at 7:15 p.m.

Additional presentations include:

-Wednesday, Oct. 12, Culture, Autonomy and Aged Care

Dr. Grant Gilette, MSc, MB, ChB, DPhil (Oxon), FRACS, neurosurgeon and professor of Medical Ethics, Otago University, Dunedin, New Zealand

-Friday, Oct. 21, The Positive Potential of Caregiving: Surviving, Thriving and Finding Meaning

Dr. Davidicus Wong, MD, family physician, Burnaby

For more information about the Dialogue on Aging public presentations, times and locations, and/or to find out how you can make a donation to the Tapestry Foundation for Health Care to support dementia research and services for seniors, call 604.877.8335 or visit www.tapestryfoundation.ca.

About Tapestry Foundation for Health Care

Tapestry Foundation for Health Care is the amalgamation of three organizations with a long history of supporting compassionate health care in Vancouver – St. Vincent’s, Holy Family and Mount Saint Joseph Hospital Foundations. It was established in 2007 as an umbrella fundraising organization to serve and support seven of 16 Providence Health Care facilities including Mount Saint Joseph Hospital, Holy Family Hospital, St. Vincent’s Hospital Langara, St. Vincent’s Campus of Care, Brock Fahrni Pavilion, Marion Hospice and Youville Residence. The Foundation supports these sites by raising funds for medical equipment, programs, services, education, and research in the field of elder care.

Through these sites, Tapestry Foundation raises funds for the diverse care needs of more than 700 seniors, and the ongoing needs for updated equipment and technology. Donations to Tapestry Foundation support purchases of medical equipment, quality of life programs and services, professional medical education, and geriatric research.

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