Where ‘Caring Matters’

Written by Carolyn Girard, The Catholic Register,

Sherri Auger

TORONTO - With Caring Matters, the company she founded seven years ago, Sherri Auger aims to help the aging population in the same way she helped her own parents. She works as a consultant to aging parents or their children for decision making and estate planning in preparation for illness and death.

About a year before she founded the Toronto-based company, which now has another three employees, Auger was faced with the sudden need to place her father in long-term care after her mother, his primary care-giver, became ill and passed away.
“That’s when I really recognized the need to help people find resources that they needed,” she said. “It’s the lack of resources and information that gets people overwhelmed.”

Auger said a lot has changed in seven years, especially the target audience.

“I found that seven years ago, when we were doing the archdiocese presentations, it was the aging population we were talking to. I’ve noticed in the past few years, we’re talking to their 40- or 45-year-old children,” she said.

So some of the basics are the same — draw up a will and assign a power of attorney — but there are more dynamics.

“It’s educating the population on how to talk to their parents on these things and knowing the key triggers of knowing when to get involved with mom and dad,” she said.

Usually, this is when the aging parent undergoes a medical change, a change in ability or psychologically. For instance, they’re not functioning well, they’re leaving the stove on or they’re not paying the bills.

She encourages aging parents to write down important information and not to leave their family guessing. If parents aren’t giving out that information, adult children should ask them the important questions. For example, she said parents need to lay out the details of how they would like to be buried, where and what assets go to whom. Someone should be aware of where the safety deposit box is located and what bank accounts they have so these can be closed soon after they’re gone.

“Don’t put your kids in the position that they don’t know if they did the right thing,” she tells parents.

Because not every parent wants to divulge all their personal information, Auger’s company can act as as a power of attorney — a third party who gains nothing from putting mom or dad in long-term care or calculating their assets.

But more than this just being a business, Auger actually cares about where her clients will end up.

“The people who we take care of, at least if they get good care in their last few years, at least we’ve made a difference in their lives,” she said.

With this new passion in life, she also incorporates her faith life.

“I pray most times before I go to see a client and definitely pray before I do presentations,” she said. “I know there are messages to be delivered to each group and I hope that the Holy Spirit guides me and gives me the words of wisdom that particular group needs to hear.”

Auger said she probably gets some of this passion for helping the elderly from seeing her own 97-year-old grandmother suffer in a facility 20 years ago when she was placed on the wrong floor for her level of care.

“I walked in there and didn’t want to leave her there because I found the atmosphere was just horrendous, but I do believe that was my first experience with saying I wanted to help people who are at that point, and that’s when I realized you need to be proactive. I remember thinking, ‘boy, this is not the way I want it to go with my parents.’ ”

Auger said there are even more things for people to think about when it comes to illness and death today than back then, which is why she is so committed to sharing her knowledge.

“Something much harder today is that the hospital systems have changed an awful lot,” she said. “If you can survive the wait times you’ll be OK, but people wait too long.”

Among many other issues she has with the hospital system treatment of the elderly is the price.

Now, a person can’t apply to long-term care until they are discharged from the hospital, she said, but with nowhere appropriate to stay with their level of needed care, it can cost anywhere from $53 to $700 a day to remain in a hospital bed until they are accepted in a long-term care facility. Auger said many hospitals encourage the elderly to apply to any long-term care centre with an available bed, which might not actually suit their needs, such as their religious needs.

“The faith aspect is very important most of the time and that’s something the adult children sometimes don’t think about,” she said. “I ask, ‘What is the particular faith aspect in this facility?’ Do they have communion or services? You want to make sure you go to a place that has the faith system you value and are going to be comfortable with.”

Auger said she sees many elderly people turn to their faith as they become ill and they need to have access to their religious resources. The elderly will also often return to their mother tongue when reaching their last few years, so it is helpful to find a home where some staff also speaks that language.

To find out more about Caring Matters, visit **www.caringmatters.ca.**