



Toronto hospital fights 'chronicities'

Ad campaign uses made-up words to highlight real problem of multiple chronic illnesses

Joanne Laucius

The Ottawa Citizen

Monday, November 05, 2007

Osteocanceritis. Neurodiabesity. Arthrostroma.

A Toronto hospital is using these made-up words on bus shelters, billboards and newspaper ads to draw attention

to multiple chronic diseases, complex health conditions it says are "the new frontier of health care."

Bridgepoint Health, a University of Toronto-affiliated hospital and research facility, released a survey last week that suggests half of Canadians have at least one chronic disease, and 70 per cent of those over the age of 45 have at least two.

At the same time, 92 per cent of 1,351 respondents in the Harris/Decima online consumer panel said they have never heard of complex chronic disease. The survey has an associated margin of error of 2.7 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

By definition, chronic diseases are usually long-lasting and worsen over time. They can often be controlled, but not cured. Chronic diseases include cancer, arthritis, diabetes, psychiatric illnesses and respiratory conditions such as asthma.

The aging population and improved treatment mean that some people will be juggling treatment for three or four chronic diseases, said Marian Walsh, president and CEO at Bridgepoint.

"This is the most prevalent health care issue of our time, but no one is talking about it," said Ms. Walsh, who added that chronic diseases eat up 70 per cent of health resources.

Bridgepoint's advertising campaign, which costs about \$800,000, will roll out over about six weeks in the Toronto area. Ms. Walsh says the money will be well spent if it attracts attention and philanthropic dollars to the issue.

There is growing interest in the toll of chronic diseases. This past week, researchers from around the world gathered in Calgary to discuss preventing and managing chronic illnesses. According to the World Health Organization, 60 per cent of all deaths are due

to chronic diseases and that number is projected to increase by 17 per cent over the next decade.

Norman Giesbrecht, a senior scientist with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, was one of the authors of a report released last March that looked at the

costs of chronic disease in Canada.

The problem with calculating the total cost is that while a lot of studies have focused on particular illnesses, he said, it's impossible to add up all the numbers and come up with a true total, because some people have more than one condition.

"There are NGOs and government sectors working on specific chronic diseases, but there is no group looking at multiple factors and conditions," Mr. Giesbrecht said.

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