
Colleges and University
Retiree Associations
of Canada



Associations de retraités
Des universités et collèges
du Canada

NEWSLETTER / BULLETIN

Spring 2016 Issue No. 22

A prairie welcome for CURAC/ARUCC delegates to the annual conference in May

The University of Saskatchewan Retirees Association is pleased to host the CURAC/ARUCC 2016 conference on the University of Saskatchewan campus in Saskatoon from May 25-27, 2016.

The program explores the theme “Past, Present and Future of the University: 'Idea of the University' (Newman Model) to the Research University (Humboldtian Model) to the Corporate University (General Bull Moose Model) to ?? – University, whither goest thou?”

The conference daily plan:

Wednesday, May 25:

- Welcome Reception

Thursday, May 26

- Changing Post-Secondary Institutions and Education: The Evolution of the Corporate and Research University – Dr. Michael Atkinson, Professor, Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy and former provost.
- The Metamorphosis of the Saskatchewan Polytech and the Community Colleges – Dr. Larry Rosia, President, Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

- Innovation Place – University Business Partnerships – S.P. Van Isman, President, Innovation Place.
- Indigenization of Post-Secondary Education and Idle No More- – Dr. Ken Coates, Canada Research Chair.
- Age-Friendly Saskatoon and Age-Friendly University of Saskatchewan.
- Aging in Place
- Banquet – “Town and Gown in Saskatoon,” with Jeff O’Brien, city archivist.

Inside this issue

- President’s message / 2
- SFU celebrates its jubilee / 3
- Giving it away: Getting some respect / 4
- Mexican winter interlude / 7
- Sunny days for healthcare? / 10
- Governments ponder pension reforms / 11
- Is cheating death by euthanasia ever a solution? / 13

Friday, May 27

- CURAC/ARUCC Sharing Best Practices
- Annual general meeting
- Retiree Outreach and Engagement
- Discussion Groups
- Official end of conference
- Tours (optional): Free tour of the Canadian Light Source or Rayner Dairy Research and Teaching Facility
- A river cruise with supper on Friday evening for those staying in Saskatoon on Friday evening.

Accommodation arrangements have been made at the Park Town Hotel located on the river bank in Saskatoon, and in residences at the University of Saskatchewan.

Copy and paste:

usra.usask.ca/CURAC2016Conference into your web browser for information on the conference program, registration and accommodation. An early bird conference rate will be available until March 28.

If you prefer you may print your registration form from the above website site (which is secure), or you may also send us a message at ss.usra@usask.ca, and we'll send you a registration form to complete and mail back to us via Canada Post.

Come and enjoy prairie hospitality in a great setting on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River. We look forward to seeing you in May.

The rhythm of academic life still resonates, even in retirement

Dear colleagues:

The familiar cycle of an academic year continues to resonate in the lives of retired faculty and staff at Canada's universities and colleges. Most of it is reflected in the annual seasons—we are now anticipating the pleasures of spring and this resonates with the time active faculty, staff and students are busily preparing for the end of term.

For CURAC/ARUCC, it means your board of directors is preparing both the culmination of the year during the annual conference in Saskatoon May 25-27, 2016 and for the beginning of a new round of activities in the upcoming year. Elsewhere in this newsletter you will read of the program carefully crafted by our University of Saskatchewan Retirees Association. Those of us privileged to attend will enjoy stimulating lectures

and presentations as well as opportunities to meet and benefit from interaction with colleagues across Canada. There is no better opportunity to become inspired by innovative practices introduced by our remarkably diverse CURAC/ARUCC member associations. I often feel the conference is of particular benefit to the new members of the boards and executives of our member associations as they have opportunities to learn about the experiences of others. The banquet at Queen's last year was particularly enjoyable as the new program of awards and tributes was rolled out and we met and learned about outstanding colleagues and their achievements.

I have no doubt that these rhythms are also felt in CURAC/ARUCC member associations. I enjoy

reading when possible newsletters of these organizations and learning about the intellectual and socially stimulating events that sustain all of us.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will find my report on a most interesting conference, “Sharing the Knowledge: Navigating Retirement Transitions” held in early January, 2016, at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. I have tried to share some lessons learned at that meeting, particularly an apparent change in thinking about retirement, characterizing it as only one feature of the academic life cycle that begins prior to employment and continues beyond the stage at which the pay cheques stop coming—retirees very frequently continue to make important contributions to the institutions where

many have spent most of their working lives. Your comments would be most welcome



I look forward to greeting many of you in Saskatoon.

Cheers,
Ken Kenneth D. Craig, O.C., Ph.D., LL.D.
President, CURAC/ARUCC

SFU celebrates 50th: retirees’ association book project is a very personal volume of history and opinion

Simon Fraser University celebrated its jubilee in 2015 and the SFU Retirees Association (SFURA) commemorated the milestone by publishing a historical memoir, titled – *Remembering SFU on the Occasion of Its 50th Birthday*.

The book was completed in early 2016 and contains more than 40 stories by faculty, staff, students, the administration, and former presidents, covering the beginnings, the troubles, and the spectacular growth of SFU over its first five decades. It has more than 150 pages of true memories of those that were there.

Recognizable are many significant names such as Ron Baker, Jack Blaney, Michael Stevenson, Marilyn Bowman, Martin Loney, Marilyn Cairns, Klaus Rieckhoff, Jerry Zaslove, Evan Alderson – the

tales that they, and others, all tell are enthralling. Their stories are illustrated by many photographs that you may not have seen before, but which are nevertheless mementos of SFU’s past.

The book project was SFURA’s contribution to the University for its 50th Birthday Celebration and is dedicated to Margaret Jones, a support staff member who served SFU for every one of its 50 years and retired in 2015 at age 87.

The SFU memoir is a treasured set of memories and reflections that provides a retrospective perspective on a relatively new university.

The book, *Remembering SFU on the Occasion of Its 50th Birthday*, may be ordered from website: www.sfu.ca/retirees/book-remembering-sfu.html

Five lessons arising from The SFURA history book project

It began as an idea. A year ago we decided to contribute to the 50th anniversary celebrations at SFU by creating a book of memories from as many of the key players as we could round up. But between the idea and, in this case, a finished book, is a lot of hard work. What follows is a cautionary tale.

- Lesson 1: Start early before everything is planned and the budget is fully assigned.

The beginning was disappointing and the editor almost cancelled the project, but later on key players agreed to contribute.

- Lesson 2: Persevere. The troubles that you run into are a matter of you learning how to do the job and develop the strategies that you need to finish it.

We decided to include everyone – students, staff, professors, and presidents. As a result, the book contains several points of view on the same event.

- Lesson 3: Be flexible. Follow the opportunity in unfolding events. You have heard about the "troubles" in our early days. Although many submissions were well written, others had to be corrected and a few rewritten.

- Lesson 4: Find a way to deal with serious problems. Problem-solving is critical, but seldom as delicate as altering the work of others.

- Lesson 5. Identify and develop a strong team to handle all of the jobs that need to be done.

As we neared completion, an array of jobs appeared that we hadn't anticipated. The book was catching fire and the print number soared from a couple of hundred to over a thousand.

These are a few of the lessons that we learned in developing our book. These and more will be part of our presentation at the 2016 conference. And we will have the hard evidence of our success – copies of the book itself *Remembering SFU on the Occasion of Its 50th Birthday*.

– as recalled by Jim Boyd, Tom O'Shea, Maurice Gibbons, members of the Simon Fraser University Retirees Associations.

Giving it Away: Getting Some Respect

California conference explores creative ways to keep post-retirement ties strong and relevant

By Ken Craig

On behalf of CURAC/ARUCC, I attended a most interesting meeting on "Sharing the Knowledge: Navigating Retirement Transitions" in Los Angeles, January 11-12, 2016. It was sponsored by the American Council on Education, with co-sponsorship from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation

and the U.S. Association of Retirement Organizations in Higher Education (AROHE). The majority of speakers and participants were senior administrators (e.g., provosts, vice provosts, associate deans, human resources representatives, etc.) at U.S. colleges and universities, with others

attending representing the retirement community or those serving this community. The following provides commentary from notes I took at the meeting.

The major preoccupation was the “wicked issues” that arose when universal mandatory retirement was abandoned in 1994 and the search for solutions. Many presentations described efforts to resolve the challenges. Large numbers of tenured faculty have chosen to work past the “normal” retirement age. This is complicated by large numbers of non-tenured instructors on teaching staffs. Considerable data has now been accumulated on issues that impact the higher education workforce, including a developing understanding of the aging global population, the aging professoriate and changing cultures concerning retirement on university campuses. However, there remains a paucity of research on the values older workers bring, what constitutes productivity, and the costs of different policies. A more realistic perception of retirees is emerging, something other than “over the hill” or “dead wood” stereotypes. A recurrent theme at the meeting was that by spending more, productive older workers could achieve more. I was very impressed with the attention that some senior university administrators are devoting to addressing workforce issues as they seek to keep the academic workforce dynamic for research, teaching and service activities.

Retirement is being reconceptualised as a feature of the overall life span of academics. The more enlightened universities are promoting the wellbeing and benefits of retired faculty and staff, including development of effective retiree organizations, and recognizing continuity and anticipating later stages early in the career.

At least among the universities present at the meeting, there seems to be increasing respect for retirees. A jaded perspective would be that this only reflects access to their salaries if they retire, but there also seems to be an appreciation that decades long careers and commitments to institutions and professions often translates into benefits for the universities following retirement. Note the following data soon to be published based on a survey of retirees from the 10 campuses of the University of California:

- 56% still teaching
- 60% have academic work in progress
- 30% receive grant funding
- 50% serve as consultants
- 15% work in business enterprises
- 46% involved in service outside the

university

Senior university administrators seem to be recognizing that supporting these activities is very advantageous to achieving the objectives of their institutions. To this must be added the intangible value of voluntary services. Volunteers are critical to the sustainability of universities. Retirees no longer draw cheques—they give away what they do for free. Most universities recognize this through support for alumni associations, but not particularly well in support of academic retirees. There has been some effort to quantify the value of retiree efforts. A study at UCLA led to the conclusion that the contributions of some 320 faculty retirees amounted to an equivalent of \$100,000 per person per year! I would add that this preoccupation with ongoing scholarly contributions of retirees does not include consideration of the rich contributions of academic retirees to the community at large.

The dialogue is changing around work and retirement at universities. Blunt one-size-fits-all

instruments such as payment for early retirement and phased retirement is being abandoned in favour of learning how to keep productive people in the labour force. Age is not a good index of competence and productivity. The trend is toward individualized, targeted employee management or variable job opportunities for workers based on individual productivity and goals.

Drilling down in the data provided intriguing observations. Three categories of older workers seem to be identifiable: those who plan to retire (35%), those who would like to retire, but perceive they cannot (16%), and those who would like to work beyond the usual retirement age (49%). Females are reported to be more likely to retire at the traditional age. And so forth. Life planning (financial, psychosocial) seems to be essential. Faculty often seem uninformed about financial issues; sometimes preoccupation with same is only covering for psychosocial issues (such as, what would I do if I retired?).

Universities seem to be responding by providing increased support pre and post retirement. For example, at Princeton, a new retirement plan includes extra university financial commitments to pension plans for retiring in advance, financial planning early in the career and support for productive academic careers following retirement. (emeritus appointments, office and lab space, secretarial and computer support, retention of computing privileges and faculty email, use of library, parking permits, opportunities to teach, appointments as senior scholars for those with active research careers, eligibility for grants, a \$5000 allocation, and ability to accept new pdfs and other researchers). Spending more brought benefits: the mean retirement age was reduced and satisfaction among retirees was good.

There were lots of other tidbits. I'll briefly note a number: One university had to address severe reluctance to even talk about retirement, particularly any public display of interest. Faculty perceived they became invisible once retirement was broached. Another university took pride in its effort to address the needs of the "whole person" through an extensive consultation process and was impressed with late career vitality; it was impressed with the desire of retirees to remain connected to their institutions (75% self-identified). People reported often feeling abandoned and angry with their universities, feeling the institutions hadn't fulfilled social contracts. Often the retiree's attachment isn't to the university, but to the discipline in which they have worked—they would like a continuing attachment to their professional organization or discipline more so than the university. Retirement organizations on campus are seen as very valuable resources for universities as they are recognized as providing the bridge between active campus lives and the "netherland." They provide opportunities to engage, a place on the campus.

In summary, universities, at least those attending this meeting, now clearly have the retirement transition on their radar, unlike in the past. The workforce issues described above now have them supporting engaged and productive retirements, long before the occasion.

The conference program is described at: <http://www.acenet.edu/events/Pages/Sharing-the-Knowledge-Navigating-Retirement-Transitions.aspx>.

I heartily recommend the following book: Van Ummersen, C.A., McLaughlin, J.M., & Duranleau, L.J. (Eds.). (2014). *Faculty retirement: Best practices for navigating the transition*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

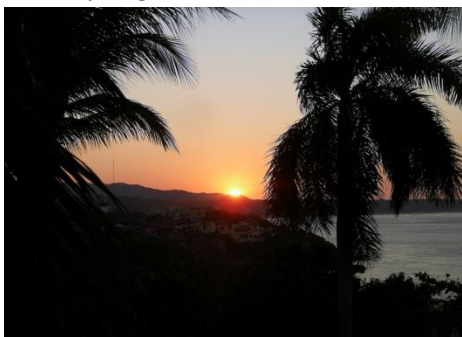
A Mexican Winter Interlude

by Bev Stefureak

For 12 years we have escaped from the deepest winter in Thunder Bay to become squatters – six to eight weeks – in the far south of Mexico. It's an annual experience that has enriched our lives much beyond the trading of sub-zero pre-Cambrian chill for the equally extreme 30-plus temperatures of the Oaxacan Pacific Coast. We head for the same place every year; a bustling fishing port nestled on the coast flanked by the Sierra Madre. Puerto Escondido (hidden port) is a six-hour, 380 km journey southeast of Acapulco, or an equally winding, to-be-driven-carefully 90 km northwest along the coastal highway from Huatulco.

We first went post-retirement, enticed by friends, and decided quickly that this was our kind of get-away. No all-inclusive resorts, no resorts in fact, no evidence of external influences attempting to re-shape the Mexican way of life, and a definite sense that the North Americans you did meet (mostly Canadian) were also looking for a winter retreat that provided an untainted cultural experience.

Our day begins thus. Cool breezes off the



mountains awaken us at 6:30 or 7:00. Our terrace faces east, on an escarpment overlooking two principal bays of the harbor and much of the

town. It is rarely cloudy, so we have the daily joy of watching the sun pop up over the Sierra Madre painting the ocean golden for those first few minutes of the breaking morn. And “pop” it does. At 16 degrees latitude, from first peep over the horizon to full orb takes about 30 seconds. We never tire of these few short moments. We brew our morning coffee and tea. Oaxaca state is known for its excellent coffee bean; many of the plantations (*finca*) are in the mountains within a few hours by car of Puerto Escondido. Their products are available in small hole-in-the-wall stores in Puerto, where the proprietor roasts the beans himself and will supply you with a kilo of your preferred blend and grind for about CDN\$6. Fresh tropical fruit from the market, great Mexican yogurt, an awesome Mexican blend of granola, and freshly baked bread/buns/pastry from the many *pastelerias* in town are our pickings for breakfast. The agriculture within barking distance of the town supplements the produce trucked to the *mercado* from farther afield so we are assured to always have our choice of fresh and perfect papaya, pineapple, mango, starfruit, bananas and the best juice oranges on the planet. Or, if the morning palate craves protein, one might choose a hearty full breakfast of fresh --- so fresh they do not need refrigeration – eggs, and bacon that is sliced to your liking at a favorite meat stall in the *mercado*. It is yummy bacon, but we marvel every year at the taste of the eggs. Until comparison is available, one forgets how far from fresh are supermarket eggs.

It is not necessary to know Spanish for day-to-day living in Puerto and some “gringos” choose not to learn any words or phrases. Most, though, feel as

we do that it is a courtesy to the Mexicans to at least try and, when one does so, they will help along – repeating and slowing their speech when they see it might help; correcting when necessary, always with a beautiful huge smile. Sometimes one is embarrassed by the correction, but you do remember. Several years ago, shopping in the fish market, with a half-hour walk home in 30-degree Celsius heat, as is normal, I requested of the stall-keeper that he add “*helado*” to my bag of shrimp. He grinned widely, looked me right in the eye and said “*hielo, senora, hielo.*” I had asked for ice cream to be put in the shrimp bag. Since then, I have never had trouble with instant recall of the word for ice.



Afternoons pass either with long walks exploring the town, conducting the business of market shopping for meat, fish, vegetables, *supermercado* shopping for staples, flaking out at, or walking, one of the four beaches within five minute’s proximity, or spending an hour at the pool doing what one does at the pool. Trying to outstare the iguanas is fun! This year, Matt took up snorkeling and spent happy hours pretending he was a fish of many beautiful colours. Descriptions of his swimming “partners” have almost convinced his life partner that she needs to get some backbone, learn not to panic, and join him in what is surely a

very pleasant way to spend an hour or two in tropical waters.

If the beach/pool scene wears thin, there are always opportunities to broaden your life experience. A turtle reserve about seven km out of town begins releasing baby turtles in mid-January. Because they release many each evening, the biologists are grateful for visitors who will help keep the babies scrambling in the right direction while coincidentally creating an unwelcoming environment for the swooping pelicans hoping to scoop up a tasty morsel.





Twenty minutes west along the coastal highway, one can visit Laguna Manialtepec, a huge brackish mangrove lagoon that, but for the rainy season May to October, is naturally barricaded from the sea. Over the winter season, an Ontario naturalist offers half-day bird tours, and local entrepreneurs offer night-time tours of the laguna to observe the phosphorescence. Both are fascinating excursions.

One may hop a local bus and visit surrounding villages to participate in fiestas that have been happening annually for over 100 years. This always promises to be a memorable time; the food is basic Mexican, prepared outdoors and excellent, the musical artists singing and dancing are decked out in traditional festive dress and are the best regional talent, and sometimes the fiesta includes a rodeo. Or you might be lucky enough to

hear of a village in the mountains celebrating the religious anniversary of its namesake and to figure out the local transport to get there. These are Mexicans celebrating Mexico; they do not expect us, nor care if a non-Mexican shows up. But you can be assured that, if we do, we will be welcomed as part of the Mexican celebrants.

For those who wish, there are also some usual tourist offerings. One can go para-sailing or horseback riding. One can rent a small boat with two capable Mexican fishermen to take you for a half-day of fishing for dorado, marlin, and tuna which arrive in mid-late January; or on trips to spot humpback whales, orcas, dolphins and turtles. There is a *mescal* (gut-scorching relative of tequila) factory east of Puerto which one may tour and there is an iguana farm to be seen.

Restaurants in Puerto are many and almost always very good. Fortunately, aside from a few excellent pasta/pizzarias one can find little evidence of North American influence in food. There are no fast-food outlets – no KFC, no McDonalds, none. The ubiquitous hamburger is offered by some Mexican restaurants but a combination of the unusually tasty ground beef in Puerto and the ingenuity of Mexican cooks has produced exceptional variations of the old standby. We enjoy small Mexican restaurants that serve only tacos (real ones), others that serve only *tlayudas*



(Mexican variation of a pizza), others that serve only *pozole* (a soup of shredded meat, hominy, shredded cabbage, fresh sliced radishes), larger more traditional restaurants that specialize in Oaxacan cuisine which is unique in Mexico, and some who serve the best prepared fish and seafood we've ever experienced. And lest beef lovers despair, our rolodex lists at least two steak houses that promise the tastiest, tender Argentinian cuts served with blue cheese sauce. Dinner out at the smaller restaurants averages about CDN\$15 for two, meal, beer or wine and tip. In the larger restaurants, a well-prepared and elegantly served supper for two, with drinks and tip, averages about CDN\$25.

Four years ago, we had seen some decline in business activity, and what seemed like a slow-down in the local economy. January 2014, there was a hint of change and one year later things were bustling and busy. For the first time ever, it was necessary to reserve in some restaurants. Taxi prices had risen from a long-time flat rate of 20 pesos (CDN\$1.70) anywhere in town to 25 pesos. New construction was evident. Airlines offering daily connections from Puerto to Mexico City have increased from two to four. All signs that things are looking better for this region of Mexico and that is very good.

-- Bev Stefureak is a member of the CURAC/ARUCC board of directors.

Sunny Days for Health Care?

Reflections from the CURAC Health Care Policy Committee

With the change of government at the federal level, health care professionals and provincial governments, as well as social activists, have begun to push for urgently needed reforms and increased funding. Federal contributions to Medicare have gradually declined over the decades from 50% of costs to the current level of 20%, leaving more fiscal responsibility at the provincial level and little national direction. With the current federal-provincial agreement about to end in 2017, the time is ripe for at least a rebalancing if not a thorough overhaul of health care policies and priorities as Canada confronts an aging population, high drug prices and a system that seems geared more to the needs of health care professionals than patients.

Groups such as CARP, the Council of Canadians and the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions

have all issued calls for transformative change: CARP's press release (20 January 2016) argues that "the most fundamental change is perspective—design the health care system to serve the needs of the patients not the hospitals and doctors." The opportunity for transformative change appeared in the report from the Advisory Panel on Healthcare Innovation chaired by David Naylor and shelved by the Harper government. All three groups stress the need for a national plan that would coordinate action so that universal access to quality health care is available no matter where you live or how much you earn. Like the Council of Canadians, the CFNU argues for a new Health Accord but one that includes a Social Accord that pays attention, not just lip service, to the social determinants of health. More than the other two groups the nurses place strong emphasis on a national strategy for aging which

includes increased access to community and home care for the elderly and those who need mental health services (CFNU, 20 January 2016).

CARP urges that a pharmacare plan should be more than bulk buying; it should include a national formulary and affordable pricing. The Council of Canadians goes even further not only demanding universal access and first dollar coverage but also a publicly administered plan and an “evidence-based national formulary drawing on the best clinical and economic facts.” Health care should also be “carved out” from international trade deals and a mechanism put in place to evaluate the impacts of such deals on health care. (Brent Patterson, Political Director, Council of Canadians, 21 January 2016) This is an important point, given the discussions now underway about the Trans-Pacific Partnership deal.

But sunny days for health care also require changing the ways the system works, as the new Minister of Health stated at the end of the meetings with provincial and territorial health ministers. A new era of collaboration, sharing ideas and best practices, seems to be in the works promising innovation in health care delivery. The provinces, health care groups and social activists are however, also insisting that the federal government contribute at least 25% of health care costs by 2025. That may be a key ingredient in whether we will indeed see sunny days in Canadian health care in the future. Given the demographics of aging, such reforms are essential.

Linda Kealey is chair of the Health Care Policy Committee of CURAC/ARUCC. This article was also published as Bulletin #11 on the CURAC/ARUCC website.

Provincial and federal govts ponder legislation changes with pension implications

The effect of the recent substantial market downturn on investment returns, and hence the indexation provision in many plans in all provinces may be the development of greatest concern for current pensioners.

The federal and provincial governments concluded at their meeting in early December, 2015, that enhancement of the Canada Pension Plan is not appropriate in the current economic environment, notwithstanding that only a few years ago all provinces had been in favor. The lack of action on the CPP means no offsetting action will be required for university plans whether integrated with, or in addition to the CPP. It may be that in some university plans that future increases in CPP premiums would be offset by an equal decrease in plan premiums to keep the total premiums constant. You will recall that the purpose of an enhanced CPP is to force greater pension savings on those deemed not saving sufficiently for retirement. Those belonging to a current work-based plan have not been flagged as part of the “problem” group.

The effect of this new decision on the recently legislated Ontario Registered Pension Plan (ORPP) is unknown, but in any event Ontario universities seem likely to qualify for exemption from participation. The Association of Canadian Pension Managers (ACPM) wrote Ontario Premier Wynne late in January urging a one-year deferral to the start of the ORPP, but the premier announced shortly afterwards that Ontario intended to proceed as scheduled.

The University Pension Project in Ontario may soon announce the results of its design phase. That phase was to end December 31. Pension Committee member George Brandie reported on this and other matters in the January edition of *RAQnews* from which the following is an extract: "... Associate Vice-Principal (Human Resources) Al Orth reported on the negotiations to create a new Jointly Sponsored Pension Plan for Ontario universities which, if specific criteria are met, will be granted a permanent solvency funding exemption by the Ontario government. The ten universities (represented by their administrations and employee unions) held two-day mediated negotiations on November 28 and 29 to try to finalize the 'design framework' of a new plan. Although the negotiations were said to be 'productive' the weekend ended before all outstanding items could be addressed. Participants agreed in principle to continue the process. They must submit a progress report to the Ontario Government by December 31." You can read more about this process on the OCUFA website at: www.ocufapensionreview.ca Any new plan, if approved, is unlikely to come into effect before 2018.

University pensioners in Quebec will be affected in the medium and long term by the terms of Bill 75: "An Act respecting the restructuring of university-

sector defined benefit pension plans and amending various legislative provisions", introduced by the provincial government on November 11. The scope of Bill 75 as stated in the report is that with "Bill 75, all university-sector DB plans must be restructured by December 31, 2017 in accordance with the provisions of the act, based on a complete actuarial valuation as at December 31, 2014, to be submitted no later than December 31, 2015." Bill 75 also introduced the possibility that all DC plans (not only university-sector plans) could pay variable benefits to a retired member. The deadline for negotiations for restructuring benefits was set at February 1, 2016, with the possibility of extension.

Detailed information on the Quebec's Bill 75 is at website: www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-75-41-1.html

A concise summary of the terms of this legislation was issued by Morneau Shepell and is online at: www.morneaushepell.com/ca-en/insights/quebec-bill-75-will-impact-university-db-plans-and-all-dc-plans

-- from Randy Barkhouse, chair, CURAC/ARUCC pension committee; members include George Brandie (Queen's), Ken Craig (UBC), Howard Fink (Concordia), Paul Huber (Dalhousie), Al Stauffer (York) and Kent Weaver (Toronto).

Is cheating death by asserting our autonomy through euthanasia a solution?

Following the Supreme Court of Canada directive to the federal government to develop a policy on physician-assisted death, the following summary of a paper written by B.L. Mishara and D.N. Weisstub, two academics from Montreal, provides an insight into the matter. This summary, which was prepared by Michel Tousignant, is included in this issue of the Newsletter to stimulate reflection and discussion of the issue.

The paper was titled, "Premises and evidence in the rhetoric of assisted suicide and euthanasia," and published in the 2013 edition of *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*.

The meaning of words

According to the Canadian Senate Special Committee on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide, euthanasia is defined as "the deliberate act undertaken by one person with the intention of ending the life of another person to relieve the person's suffering where the act is the cause of death." (Senate of Canada, 1995, p.8) In countries where euthanasia is illegal, euthanasia can be prosecuted as an act of homicide. In the case of assisted suicide, someone provides the means or information about how to commit suicide to another person who has expressed the intention of ending his/her life. The practice of refusing treatment or withdrawing from a treatment is considered a "natural" death. The situation where a physician treats the pain and where the result can be accelerating death is called "double effect". This decision is morally justifiable according to a long tradition going back to Thomas of Aquinas. In this case, life is maintained as long as possible within reasonable limits. The confusion about the semantics of these terms has led to the result that 70 per cent of the population of Quebec supports euthanasia when in fact many respondents only referred to the end of the treatment.

Constitutional guarantees

Constitutional guarantees of freedom and non-discrimination have furnished arguments to both sides of the euthanasia and assisted suicide debate. One strong argument in favor of the legalization of euthanasia is that severely handicapped patients, with an advanced state of paralysis for instance, do not have the capacity to take their own life. To exercise their "choice to die," they eventually need external assistance. On the other hand, some argue that providing means of this nature is not the obligation of a just government. In practice, a review of countries where euthanasia has been legalized, The Netherlands and Belgium, for example, find few of recorded cases (six and seven per cent) involving a neurological disorder and some of these patients could have ended their life without assistance. A survey by Mishara (1999) showed that people with disabilities are less likely to want to die than people without disabilities.

Others use the constitutional guarantees to argue that the government has a duty to protect the more vulnerable citizens and should make palliative care and psychosocial support priorities,

which are considered by many as sufficient in the great majority of cases.

Torn between these two positions, some would allow euthanasia for people with dire suffering if the process is carefully monitored as in The Netherlands.

In the United States, judges have generally considered themselves to be the protectors of the right to life. Consequently, they have made exceptions and allowed individuals with clear autonomy but who are in extreme suffering, to die. In Canada, in the case of *Rodriguez v British Columbia*, the Court prohibited assisted suicide. Later, the British House of Lords expressed a similar opinion, as did the European Court of Human Rights. In practice, however, there are examples of cases where persons assisting someone in death were not prosecuted when there was evidence they acted in goodwill. The middle ground position in this debate is to adopt The Netherlands' legislation making obligatory an appraisal by at least two certified professionals. The challenge is to provide a surveillance process as a check against transgression and misuse of professional discretion.

Human dignity

The concept of dignified death has been the topic of empirical assessment and has been a common ground for discussing euthanasia. Nevertheless, philosophical positions on the matter are extremely divergent. In the liberal ideal, the person possesses an inherent dignity, meaning that she or he is due respect and protection of this autonomy. Those are central attributes defining the person and subject to inalienability and inviolability. These qualities were first a mark of privilege for high-ranking citizens before being universalized to all human beings. In our

contemporary culture, human dignity is therefore regarded as an overarching protector value in the face of radical relativism. How should this principle guide us to answer requests from people wishing to end their lives? And here, the malleability of the concept does not provide ready made solutions to the debate.

If human dignity is fundamentally a moral affirmation, it is equally a psychological need to be treated as a human being as opposed to an expendable commodity. This means, for instance, to be treated as a human being and to be respected first by the people closest to us and, second, by society in general. In this sense, dignity is interchangeable with honor. The concept of honor should therefore be freed of its association with an hierarchy. Here, honor refers both to recognizing the worth and difference of every individual. It follows that we should foster "a sustaining force of mutuality" safeguarding the rights of the vulnerable.

The legal frame of the law on euthanasia tends to be stretched. In The Netherlands, there have been up to 400 requests to die in a year in the absence of severe physical or psychiatric disease. There have been many cases where those with symptoms of depression or melancholia were not provided treatment prior to their request. Requests based on a mental disorder need further consideration. Questionable practises have been documented in countries permitting euthanasia but supporters of euthanasia retort that the situation would even be worse without legalization.

Toward a best policy model

If everyone is in favor of good palliative care as a way to avoid euthanasia, only a minority of patients benefit from this of care. There are many

limitations: it is not easily or readily available, there is a lack of information on the part of the treating physician, and a false perception in the patient that palliative care is not needed in their case. Some patients would prefer not to charge the cost of their palliative treatment to their inheritance. Although palliative care is less costly than hospital treatment, the cost is nevertheless high for the non-insured patients.

Ethical and practical distinctions

Euthanasia is legal in three countries, Belgium, Luxembourg and The Netherlands. Assisted suicide, on the other hand, is legal in four states of United States.

A basic observation to consider in this debate is the fact that few people who consider suicide as an option will eventually make an attempt. And of 50 persons making a suicide attempt, only one will eventually die in this way. Given the irrevocable result, it is not surprising that people remain ambivalent toward their own suicide.

Unfortunately, the data on ambivalence among those who consider euthanasia is seriously lacking. Some indirect evidence comes from Oregon where, among the 673 individuals who received approval from two physicians after a lengthy process, 36 per cent never used the medication received for that purpose. In the case of euthanasia in Switzerland, the patient has to go to an appointment in a clinic and few are reported to change their mind, maybe in some cases due to the pressure of the environment.

Is there such a thing as a rational suicide?

Most important decisions in human life are performed with various doses of irrationality, be it to marry, to buy an expensive car or to emigrate. Euthanasia is permitted on the condition of

interminable and unsupportable pain and suffering. But in this regard, psychological research shows that decisions tend to become more irrational under the presence of pain. The decision of a patient to request euthanasia may appear understandable for an external observer, but what is really going on in the patient's mind? A study including physicians involved in a decision on euthanasia cases shows that they often have difficulties concluding that the patient meets the legal requirements (Buiting et al., 2008). Research also illustrates that many fear the period preceding a natural death despite the fact that palliative care can usually mitigate these fears. For instance, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis accounted for 45 per cent of the requests for euthanasia in The Netherlands because these patients feared the experience of suffocation. In reality, less than three per cent will eventually experience suffocation. A related observation is that only three per cent of a group of Alzheimer patients expressed a wish to die, contrary to the opinion of caregivers who tend to think the contrary.

The duty to die

Besides the end of pain and suffering, there are other possible motives to die, from being a burden for the family's caregivers or to keep the inheritance intact for survivors with financial needs. These motivations may not be shared by their loved ones, however. The idea of altruistic death is also fed by the mythical images of self-immolation by widows on their husbands' pyres in India, or by the aging and crippled Inuit asking to be abandoned on an iceberg. Again, there are extremely rare documented cases of these altruistic deaths. This issue of altruism is nevertheless present and should be therefore be taken into consideration in the debate around euthanasia in Canada.

Commodification of life and customizing death

Persons promoting a “dignified death” often argue that there is a loss on the “investment” (for life) when the energies of the sick person are depleted. Embracing death in these circumstances would be considered a kind of stop-loss decision. On the other hand, the central question of pain may relate more to the future pain, the anguish in the face of death rather than with actual pain. A majority of patients requesting euthanasia where it is legal are suffering from cancer. The literature on suicide of cancer patients may offer a window on the decision process. In fact, the risk of suicide in these patients is highest in the first year after the diagnosis, especially in the three to five months after, rather than in the last stages of the illness. Research also points out that depression is highly present in these cases of suicide and that it may be involved in the decision.

End of life practices in an ideal universe

It is important to note that both The Netherlands and Belgium have a high regard for individual freedom and, at the same time, provide an extensive network of palliative care. Having that in mind, there are many problems that may arise when a government is working in a multicultural society or when good palliative care cannot be adequately provided. Even in a country like The Netherlands, where the minimal requirements to administer euthanasia can be met, and even when a substantive percentage of the deaths are the consequence of euthanasia (1,933 or 1.4 per cent in 2005), the decision is complex and the process not always linear. Despite this high number of deaths by euthanasia, two-thirds of the requests did not lead to death by euthanasia. Half of them were stopped because the patient died in the meantime. But in a third of the cases, the physicians felt other treatments should be tried

and the patients did not follow through with their assisted death application after undergoing these treatments. In conclusion, a substantial number of patients change their mind after appropriate support has been offered.

The founder of the hospice movement in England, Dr. Cecily Saunders, thought that good palliative care would make euthanasia unnecessary. A recent Cochrane report of 2013 found “a clear and reliable evidence” that palliative care helps to reduce the symptoms burden. The late supreme court judge Huid Drion, of The Netherlands, thought that in an ideal society we could provide each mature individual with a pill to end life so that each one can enjoy the full freedom of living. There are certainly many other philosophical and practical grounds from which to discuss euthanasia. Should society be so near to its citizens in their last moments? Can pain be always controlled? Are the costs of extending life too heavy when there are other pressing needs to meet, especially in poorer countries?

We have to take into consideration that societies are imperfect, as well as the physicians and the patients involved in a decision of euthanasia. There are also financial issues, both for the governments and the families. Moral and practical arguments can be made for and against an earlier death or “natural” death. Consequently, the experts involved in these final decisions for euthanasia should be sensitive to these external issues.

Conclusion

A middle ground position to this debate, as exemplified in The Netherlands, would be to make accessible all the means to cope with suffering to citizens who have expressed a wish to die, and that this be provided before they make an

irrevocable decision. We have also to take into account that we live in a civilization where all aspects of our lives should be predicted and controlled as much as possible. No wonder then that death provokes so much anxiety. Is cheating death by asserting our autonomy through euthanasia a solution? Should this be labeled the

ultimate victory of reason or the coward refusal of destiny?

Mishara, B. L., & Weisstub, D. N. (2013). Premises and evidence in the rhetoric of assisted suicide and euthanasia. International journal of law and psychiatry, 36(5), 427-435.

News, notes, and the next edition of the newsletter

You are encouraged to contribute material for the next edition of this newsletter. What kind of material? It may be a news item from your university association highlighting a program or the outstanding contribution of a retired member. It may be a piece exploring an issue specifically relevant to people who have retired as academic or support staff from employment at a university or college in Canada.

Send your material to the co-editors:

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Deadline: anytime by the end of June, 2016.

Note: Member organizations of CURAC/ARUCC are asked to circulate this newsletter to their members.

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