



PEIRTA Newsletter

Prince Edward Island Retired Teachers' Association

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WINTER 2015

From the President

Welcome to 2015 and the first newsletter of the new year. Since our AGM on November 6 our Executive has held two meetings and discussed our priorities for the coming year.

Our first serious matter, of course, is the changes to the Drug Cost Assistance Act which target seniors over age 65 who have private insurance, making them largely responsible for covering the costs of the recently introduced Catastrophic Drug Plan. As members of the group plan that they paid into all or most of their working lives, retired teachers over 65 will now pay more for required drugs than they paid when they were working full time. They will pay more than they paid as retirees under age 65, before they became eligible for the Provincial Drug Cost Assistance Program, which was designed to offset their costs.

Marg Stewart thus spearheaded a

position paper which provides a little history of our plan since 1972 (provided by Kimball Blanchard), describes the impact of the changes, and outlines our concerns, and we requested a meeting with Hon. Doug Currie on this matter. We met on Friday, January 16 with Hon. Currie, Deputy Minister Michael Mayne, and Head of Pharmacare, Roy Cairns. We believe we got some useful information from this meeting and are looking forward to other meetings, after which we hope to have some better news in the next few months for our Association.

If you want to read the document, go to www.peirta.com, open the link for Group Insurance Forum, and you will find it there.

We are very pleased to announce that after one year in the making, the Teachers' Superannuation Commission is now ready to meet and that at our request Michel Plamondon has agreed to represent us on the Commission. We are indeed very fortunate to have someone with his knowledge as our spokesperson and we look forward to following the developments of this Commission.

We need your input in the next week as to the resolution which was brought forth at the AGM on November 6. Due to rising costs and deplet-



President Sheridyth MacNeill

ing members attending the spring socials, the Executive brought forth a resolution seeking that county socials be discontinued and that county representatives be elected at the Annual General Meeting when the rest of the Executive are elected. Only one person contacted the Executive prior to the AGM in November and spoke to this at the meeting; he asked for us to consider holding at least one spring social for all to be able to get together outside of the AGM in the fall. We implore you to let us know your feelings on this matter. You can contact

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**Visit our website at
www.peirta.com**

From the Editor

Since December 1, 2014 many of our members have begun to experience first hand the impact of the July 1, 2014 changes to DCAP, along with our Trustees' subsequent decision to delist drugs covered by DCAP under the seniors' program. The first and most obvious difference is the added cost of each prescription, up to \$15.94 from \$3.19—the same as it would be if we had no private insurance at all. The full impact with regard to Special Authorization drugs and generic vs. brand name drugs is not yet clear.

In December your executive made the decision to put together a position paper on this issue—something that could be used with Government, with members, or wherever there might be a need for a coherent and comprehensive expression of our concerns. The document has already been used in one meeting with Government, and has since been posted to the PEIRTA website. If you are inter-

ested in reading it, go to www.peirta.com, then to Group Insurance Forum, and you will find it there.

The highlights of the document are as follows:

- a brief history of the plan, along with a brief explanation of how it works;
- an explanation of changes made to the Drug Cost Assistance Act on July 1, 2014;
- an explanation of changes made to our plan on December 1, 2014;
- a summary of the anticipated impact of the changes and our major concerns;
- an appeal to Government to work with us to find a better resolution.

On a related note, if you have plans for winter travel, please be sure that you fully understand the ramifications of “non-stable” and “pre-existing” when it comes to health related issues and travel insurance. I

know a number of people this year who have cancelled plans for travel to the US, or have returned already, because of medical events and/or medication changes.

Election coming up! There will be lots of buzz around breakfast tables where retirees meet and have lots of time to speculate on who's running, who's not running, who should/should not be running, who should win, who will win, etc. etc. In the meantime, many are wondering whether anyone is currently paying attention to running the province.

PEIRTA Executive does not necessarily agree with opinions expressed in material authored by those other than official representatives of the PEIRTA, and information about opportunities offered by others is for information only—no endorsement is implied.

Next issue late May. Submit material to margstewart@pei.eastlink.ca.

If you wish to read this newsletter online instead of receiving a hard copy, send me an email and I will let you know when each issue should appear on our site and on the PEITF site.

Letters to the editor should be a maximum of 200 words, must include a one-line bio, and may be edited for length..

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President (Cont'd from 1)

any Executive member listed in the newsletter and we will address this at our next meeting on January 26.

This past year has certainly "flown by" for me and I guess that is a positive thing! Once again we find ourselves in an election year. Please give serious consideration to volunteering two years to serve on our provincial executive. If you do not feel like serving but know someone who you feel would make a strong contribution, please encourage that person to come forward. We know there are a lot of very capable retired teachers out there!!!! It is a great experience for all those who have been involved.

Church Ladies With Typewriters

These sentences reportedly actually appeared in church bulletins or were announced at church services.

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

The pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the Congregation would lend him their electric girdles.

Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.

Address Changes

If your address changes, or if you know anyone who has had a change of address and/or is not receiving this newsletter, please have him or her notify our membership chair (contact info on page 2).

You Didn't Ask, but...

Joyce McCardle

I'm back!! There was no hurricane while I was on my October cruise, so I have nothing really exciting to write about. Actually, the sea was as calm as glass for the eight days we were out. Now if I was kind, I'd stop writing here. I'm not!!

Our first port of call was Grand Turk Island. I took an excursion around the island; my daughter went horseback riding in the surf. It is a very small island and the tour was interesting. The temperature was 90 degrees with humidity around the 79% mark. When I got back to the ship, I looked like a spaghetti noodle (OK, OK, not quite that slender!!) that had been horribly over-cooked. Lorelei, who has a warped sense of humor like her mother, took a picture; I told her to delete it or she and camera were going overboard.

The next port was La Ramana, Dominican Republic. We both took a tour into the sugar cane fields and a short jaunt into the rain forest. We got to chew on a piece of raw cane and our guide very kindly gave us each a drink of rum and sprite!! This is a very poor island, as everyone knows. However, the children were just getting out of school as we passed through a small settlement. They were all dressed in uniform and had such bright smiles on their faces. I noticed one Dad picking up three children on a little motorcycle. Picture it! Four people on a bike (no helmets, of course). I even saw as many as three people on a regular bike. It costs \$30/month to send a child to school; this includes uniforms and books. The average salary is about \$250/month. You can see that many children go uneducated if there are several in a family. We did a short tour around the city; it would not be a good idea to stroll around here on one's own. As a matter of fact, our bus had an armed guy on it; he was pretty skinny, so I hoped the gun was functional. Again it was extremely hot.

The third port was Curacao. We just

strolled around the town and back to the ship. It was a very nice, clean place, and I felt quite safe there.

The last port was Aruba, which is owned by the Netherlands. Again I took a tour. The buses are old school buses, but painted with garish colours and graffiti. The windows are removed and I learned on these tours why dogs hang their heads out car windows; that's the best way to get some cool air if one is lucky enough to have a slight breeze. By now I'd guess you are coming to the conclusion that I don't do heat well!! What the heck was I doing in the South??

The next two days were spent at sea heading back to Miami. We were well fed and well entertained, so the time went quickly.

Upon docking in Miami, we rented a car and drove down through the Keys. This is a marvelous journey, and I highly recommend it to anyone who hasn't done it. From Key Largo to Key West is 100 miles. We spent the night in Key West and explored the next day. I found three Bealls stores and lots of cheap bargains. All in all, it was a great holiday and I had 10 days with my daughter, who lives in Edmonton.

On a final note: once again, my luggage did **not** arrive with me in Miami. Somewhere the great luggage God hates me!!! I had packed a couple of extra outfits in my carry-on. If you read about my 2011 cruise, you'll know why. However, the suitcase was delivered to my stateroom before the ship sailed. Whew! And the saga continues. I arrived in Toronto on the way home luggageless (is that a word?) again. A Charlottetown cab delivered it to my door the next day.

The next excursion will be in March; Pat McCardle and I will be heading to North Myrtle Beach for a month. At least our luggage will arrive with us because we are driving down.

Group Insurance

~ by Kimball Blanchard

For almost forty years the PEITF Group Insurance Trustees have been able to provide a very effective health insurance program for retired teachers. While there was no government contribution and the members had to assume the full cost, the program offered drug coverage, travel coverage, and other health benefits to retirees and provided security to us as we got older, knowing that on the health side of issues our program would provide protection. The plan operated on a break-even basis with rate decreases and rate increases applied when necessary. Efficient administration provided for a rate decrease of approximately 13% over the last five years. While the rates of \$ 1530 single and \$3130 family were not inexpensive, many retirees have been able to carry the coverage and provide protection for themselves and their families. The plan has been financially stable and the members have been protected with a solid health insurance program.

On July 1, 2014 the financial viability of our plan was jeopardized when the Department of Health and Wellness changed the rules for drug coverage for seniors age 65 and over who had previously been covered under the Provincial Drug Cost Assistance Program. This program supplemented our drug plan and enabled our

Group Insurance Trustees to maintain reasonable rates for our members over 65. With the changes, any senior who had a private drug plan would now see his or her plan become the first payor for any drugs that had been previously covered under DCAP. In effect, the Department shifted the cost from Government to the private plans. The High Cost Drug Program and the Diabetes programs were also changed. Regulations were published in the *Royal Gazette* on June 28, 2014 and came into effect on July 1, 2014. There was no public announcement by the Minister of Health and Wellness, pharmacies had two days over the long weekend to adjust their systems, and retirees who had private plans did not know about any changes until they went to a pharmacy to pick up a prescription. For any Island senior over age 65 who has private insurance, nothing has changed. They continue to have any drugs listed on the DCAP formulary paid for by the Province.

Individuals who are not members of group plans but have individual plans from major carriers may not yet have seen much change as the PEI market may be a small part of the insurer's overall business, but these people could see rate increases in the future. We are not in a position to assess this.

The people most affected by these changes are the members of small plans like ours, including those at

UPEI and Holland College. Our Trustees received information from our Johnson Insurance advisor, Dale Weldon, that our plan could face increased costs in the vicinity of \$400,000 to \$500,000 per year, which could result in an increase of 25% to 40% in premiums. While these figures are estimates, it was obvious that many retirees would be faced with costs that would be substantial. The average pension for PEI retired teachers over 65 is approximately \$26,000, so any rate increase would have a significant effect on their standard of living.

Between July 1 and December 1, 2014 our plan was the first payor, and while the Trustees do not have detailed data for this period, benefits paid out for those over 65 amounted to over 100% of the premiums taken in. During this time our plan paid for the drugs previously paid for under DCAP and our members paid \$3.19 when each prescription was picked up. Prior to July the member usually did not have any cost for these same prescriptions, as our plan paid the co-pay.

On December 1, 2014 the Trustees delisted all drugs covered for seniors in the provincial formulary. UPEI and Holland College have done the same. Delisting means that the Trustees, instead of having our plan as the first payor, put the cost back on the provincial Drug Cost Assistance Program. The most obvious effect of this

change is that our members now pay \$15.94 at the pharmacy rather than the \$3.19 that was paid between July 1 and December 1. The major benefit of this is that our plan will not face the \$400,000 to \$500,000 increase in costs and thus rates should be relatively stable.

This change results in our members having significantly increased out-of-pocket expenses in spite of the fact that the brochure provided by the Department of Health and Wellness indicated that any change in out-of-pocket expenses would be only “slightly” higher or lower. For our members who have a significant number of prescriptions this “slightly higher” figure could be in the hundreds or, for a couple, even thousands of dollars. A problem has also developed in the area of Special Authorization drugs. We are still not clear on how the legislation impacts the ability of our plan to cover SA drugs that have not been approved for coverage by the Province, or whether in fact the two plans can be integrated. It is possible that a number of our members will face substantial out-of-pocket expenses along with the increased prescription fees at the pharmacy. This whole issue is being worked on at the present time. Another area of concern is the fact that the provincial plan will only pay for the generic brand of a drug and for various reasons some members must have the brand

name drug. Members in this category can apply for Special Authorization through the DCAP plan and coverage may be granted.

Representatives of the RTA met with Minister of Health and Wellness Doug Currie, Deputy Minister Michael Mayne, and Roy Cairns, Pharmacy Consultant Health System Planning and Development, to express our concerns about the unfairness of the changes made to seniors’ drug coverage and the serious implications it has for our plan and for our members. A paper was prepared and presented. The paper is posted on the RTA website under the Group Insurance Forum link. We think we received a fair hearing at the meeting, but the outcome is yet to be determined. The Trustees were to meet on January 28, but had to postpone because of the storm, and now have a meeting scheduled for February 11 to study the effects of the changes on our plan and to try to determine a course of action which may protect our plan and our members.

Despite the fact that this change in seniors’ drug coverage is designed, according to the initial announcement of the Minister, to take \$4,000,000 from Island seniors in one way or another, nobody seems concerned. Government members did not debate the bill in the legislature, the Leader of the Opposition and the Opposition Health critic made no com-

ments, and other than covering the initial announcement a year ago and an article in the *Eastern Graphic* last March, the media has ignored the issue.

When politicians of any party come to your door looking for support, ask where they stand on this issue, and if the person is a sitting member, ask why he or she voted in favour of the legislation. Make these people aware that the changes in the seniors’ drug program will have an adverse effect on our plan and will add considerable cost to our members.

Thinking about Dropping Out? Be Careful!

As predicted, we are already hearing that some members are considering dropping out of our plan. They are, for the most part, people who do not use the plan a lot, and see little return for their premium cost, or those who believe that they cannot bear the new, added costs. Their logic is sound: if the Province will cover my drug costs anyway, why should I pay out hundreds of dollars for private insurance which no longer covers a whole range of drugs?

If you are one of these people, please think long and hard. Consider the following. No one can predict what might happen in the future, and a low user could suddenly need a drug that is not on the provincial formulary but is covered by our plan. The Medavie Blue Cross formulary is more comprehensive than the Pharmacare formulary, covering approximately 5000 more prescription drugs. Also, since

See **Thinking, 6**

MEDICATION REVIEW

Did you know that if you are over age 65 and take at least three medications approved by DCAP, or if you take at least one approved medication for diabetes, you are entitled to a medication review which will be paid for by the Province? Follow-ups, where relevant, are also covered. The intent of the review is to help you better understand your medications and ensure that you are using them effectively. (Or, if you watched *Marketplace* recently and prefer to take the cynical view, to make money for pharmacies.) The review will be conducted by your pharmacist in a private, one-on-one 20 to 30 minute interview. All you have to do initially is ask your pharmacist, and he or she will guide you from there.

I've gone through one of these reviews and found it interesting and quite useful.

For full details, go to

<http://www.peipharm.info/docs/pharmacheckprogram-guide2013.pdf>.

SOCIAL, ANYONE?

At the 2014 AGM a decision was made to eliminate the county socials, primarily because attendance over the past several years has been very low and the cost far outweighs the apparent interest. However, the idea was not unanimously approved, and your Executive would like to hear what you think. Do we need more face-to-face contact than we can achieve at the AGM? If so, how do we generate more interest?

Some have suggested that we return to the Spring Fling concept, but if you recall, we moved away from that format for the same reason that we are now reconsidering the socials. Some think whatever kind of gathering we have should be primarily social, perhaps with entertainment, and that business and information sessions should be conducted at some other time. Others argue that the information is the most important element—that individual groups tend to look after their own social contact.

If you have any suggestions, please phone or email any executive member by February 24.

Thinking (Cont'd from 5)

our Trustees did not delist anything that is part of the high cost drug program, we continue to be the first payor for some very expensive drugs, as well as for the diabetic program. Our plan includes a range of benefits other than for drugs, including physio, chiropractic, massage, eye exams, glasses and contacts, hearing aids, etc. Our out-of-province travel coverage is among the best in the country, and very cost effective. If you get out of the plan, then wish you hadn't, it will be very difficult to get back in if you have any pre-existing medical conditions. Medavie Blue Cross will medically assess your application and accept or deny. Obtaining coverage from another carrier will also be difficult if you have a pre-existing medical condition. Given the cost of pharmaceuticals, and the fact that all provinces are talking about how they will handle those costs in the future, this may not be a good time to make changes to any existing coverage. And finally, we are in a state of flux, and the Trustees need some time and data in order to assess rates and fully respond to Government changes.

Please consider hanging on, at least until the dust settles!

Life Insurance Reminder

Are you approaching 65? Giving any thought to life insurance?

- At age 65 the term life insurance under the PEITF Group Insurance Plan automatically is reduced to \$15,000.
- Your coverage can be converted to a private plan with the same carrier without evidence of insurability. Apply within 31 days of turning 65.
- You may purchase an amount equal to your present coverage, or a lesser amount.
- Before your 65th birthday, so you will be prepared to make the decision that best suits your situation, you should check to find out whether you are insurable, and investigate market rates for the amount of insurance you may wish to carry.

Questions? Call Johnson at 902-628-3537 or 1-800-371-9516, or visit their office at 111 Kent Street in Charlottetown.



Gilles Arsenault



I trust that each and every one had a wonderful holiday season and that maybe some of you are now anticipating a trip or two to the sunny South. I wouldn't blame you one bit. I, along with my family, will be enjoying some warm and sunny days in Florida for the March break. The difference between you and me is that I have to come back after a week!

Nevertheless, things are very busy in education and many new things are on the horizon, like this being a negotiating year. We are well underway with our Economic Welfare Team and teachers have filled in their survey letting us know what their main concerns are. I am sure you remember those

days! Once again we are anticipating a negotiating process that will be done in good faith.

The PEITF is also readjusting its sails in terms of public relations. We are asking Island teachers to send us their classroom realities and, as a Federation, we will send a message out to Government and the public at large in order to make everyone aware of how times have changed. It is important to make people aware that teachers' workload has not only increased but has changed in many different ways.

On another note, my replacement was elected at our Semi-Annual Meeting. Bethany MacLeod will start her term as President of PEITF as of July, 2015. The Federation will be in good hands and she will be very interested in keeping the lines of communication open with the RTA.

I wish you all the best in 2015 and I hope that our paths cross sometime in the New Year!

Take Care!



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Pictures of Old Schools?

Does anyone have any pictures of old Island schools? If so, there is interest in seeing some of these in our newsletter, along with a little bit of history, if possible — school name, year closed, current function, if any. If you can scan pictures and email to me, that would be great. If not, I'm sure Canada Post could manage to get them to me at 307-520 North River Road, Charlottetown, PE, C1E1J9.

A good number of such pictures are already on our website, and I have included several of them in this newsletter. I will continue to do so as space permits.



Courtesy of Rita MacNeill



Courtesy of Rita MacNeill



First Wellington English School
Courtesy of Rita MacNeill



Cross River (Grand River) School

Recognize anyone?

Cross River (Grand River) School

Courtesy of Rita Mac Neil

Out-of-Province Travel Medical Insurance

A reminder that changes have recently been made to our out-of-province travel medical coverage. The most significant change is to the section on the stability period and the definition of stability as it relates to a pre-existing condition. From the amended section:

A pre-existing condition is considered Stable if you, in the 90 days before the departure date (or 90 days before the booking date for Trip Cancellation coverage), have not:*

- ☐ *been treated or evaluated for new symptoms or related conditions;*
- ☐ *had symptoms that increased in frequency or severity, or examination findings indicating the condition has worsened;*
- ☐ *been prescribed a new treatment or change in treatment for the condition (generally does not include reductions in medication due to improvement in the condition, or regular changes in medication as part of an established treatment plan);*
- ☐ *been admitted to a hospital for the condition; or*
- ☐ *been awaiting new treatments or tests regarding the medical condition. (does not include routine tests).*

The above criteria will be considered by Medavie Blue Cross collectively in relation to the overall medical condition.

If you have any questions, please contact Johnson Inc.

***Trip cancellation insurance coverage is not currently included in our policy.**