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Create a system seniors can trust

By: Janine LeGal
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OPINION

I worked on it for over three months and quietly cried during several interviews, more loudly after the interviews were over. So when my story about seniors and what they're eating in personal care homes was published last month ([From unpalatable to appalling](#), July 19), I experienced a range of emotions:

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The state of long-term care home food is tough to stomach for many residents and their loved ones



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thrilled that the issue I feel so strongly about was getting some attention in mainstream media. Satisfied that, after all the time and energy that went into it, the story was compelling enough to provoke readership response. But most profoundly, I felt deep sadness. Because it was over.

I'm outraged about the state of long-term care home food. The meals are indeed tough to stomach for many residents (and their loved ones). But one story about this troubling reality likely won't change much.

But then Dan Lett wrote his July 18 column about it. And then John Longhurst followed up on Aug. 5 with a feature on meals in faith-based care homes.

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Subpar food at personal care homes has been hard to stomach both for care home residents and their loved ones.

And then came the editorial (Aug. 7) summarizing all of them together just right, ending with the words I hope will bring at least some change: “Now that the issue has been brought to the forefront, however, perhaps it’s time to demand an answer to the question that has been obvious all along: don’t seniors in care in this province deserve better?”

I know I won’t rest until those in decision-making positions consider having a taste of some of the reheated PCH meals, spend some time with care home residents at mealtime to see what they’re eating, where they’re eating and how they’re eating — or not eating.

Take the time to see for themselves that staff are so often overworked, that there are too few of them, leaving many residents on their own, unable to eat.

For those fortunate enough to have family members visit and bring in delicious food from outside, there are bright moments to look forward to, but for those without family, well, there’s something else we should be talking about. Not everyone has a spouse, children, or a loving family.

I continue to receive emails, letters and private messages through social media from family members who are seriously concerned about their parent or other relative. And I’m painfully frustrated



because there is little I can do except write another letter, email, or commentary.

Back in the '80s, I would have probably organized some kind of protest demanding that the government implement not just one senior advocate but an entire office with a large, trained staff to ensure that our elders are looked after, cared for and respected. In my mind that's what I'm doing right now. Because I genuinely believe that this is what is needed. But I'm a few weeks away from turning 62 and can't wear the journalist and the activist hats at the same time.

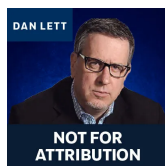
Seniors have much to offer, to teach us. Their stories, their lived experience, their wisdom, their mistakes. All of it. As the body begins to fail — and sometimes the mind, too — it would serve us all well to look after each other a whole lot better than we have been doing.

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A weekly look at politics close to home and around the world.



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I've worked with newcomers from around the world and it's not uncommon for some of them to ask me how it is that so many of our elders are left to languish in places that don't recognize them as precious, vibrant beings. I understand that there are some really good personal care homes out there. But sadly, what I continue to hear much more often is how desperately we need to shine a light on what is happening to our seniors in the not-so-good personal care homes. Even one of those is too many — not only with their less-than-perfect meals but with their lack of focus on well-being.

There's an expectation that, once seniors are placed in personal care homes, they will become depressed. I know many of us would be, with the state of things as they are. There's a worry that the food will be terrible, that the environment will be less than inspiring or esthetically pleasing. Why is that?

I have a few good friends from developing countries who have pointed out that even in places where resources are extremely limited, seniors continue to be cared for, nurtured and cherished. So when they arrive here, in this land of wealth and resources, it becomes particularly difficult to understand how it is that so many seniors are in care homes without fresh air, without art, music, good food, or life-affirming



activities. Instead of being surrounded by love, appreciation and acceptance, all too many seniors in this part of the world are viewed as an annoyance.

We need to know that older people in Manitoba can trust in a system that will look after them, instead of the alternative.

Janine LeGal is a local freelance writer.

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