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By Cory Soal
R.H.A.D.

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NEWS

Paramedics reduce 911 calls with senior's program

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Mable Holman died nine days before her 101 birthday.

As her granddaughter-in-law Annette Holman looks over a celebration of life pamphlet, she says, "one of Mable's biggest fears was going into a nursing home."

One of the main factors that kept her out of a home, up until her final days, Annette says, is the community paramedic pilot program that is set up at 8 Durham Street in Georgetown.

Halton Paramedic services have partnered with Halton Community Housing Corporation and McMaster University to implement a community health assessment pilot project.

"We wanted to see that we could do this project," said Peter McMurrrough, deputy chief of Halton's paramedic services.

The group chose one building in Georgetown and one in Milton to start off.

"Start off small, then ramp up later," McMurrrough said.

On a weekly basis, paramedics set up a clinic in each building, which were known to have

high 911 calls to attend to elderly residents.

As a preventative measure, the paramedics check blood pressure, blood sugar levels, and the mobility of residents down in the front lobby.

"There are people who don't have a family doctor, or can't get to the family doctor," McMurrrough said, explaining that some residents had unidentified conditions, medications that conflicted and more.

Paramedics also found that some residents who did not speak English were slipping through the cracks due to communication barriers. On several occasions paramedics worked with translators and found that patients had several health concerns, but could not get to a doctor, or communicate the need to see one.

"There was a gap that we identified," he said.

Every Tuesday paramedics set up their clinic at the Georgetown building, where residents like Gord Rea, 89, come down for their weekly checkup.

"I was all for it," he said, sitting down in the front lobby, his hair combed back neatly, smelling of

fresh soap. "Speaking to people in the building, it's got to be beneficial."

Rea goes around to his neighbour's apartments and encourages them to visit the clinic, residents like a couple from El Salvador - who spoke mainly Spanish.

After bringing in a translator, paramedics uncovered a number of health issues with the husband and were able to connect him with services.

"They're missing out on an opportunity," said Rea, speaking about residents who don't come down for the checkups. "They know me, they know the medications I'm on, my habits."

It's not just all about physical health either.

"Social isolation is one of the key things we've identified," said McMurrrough. "It's not all about treating the medical condition."

One of the paramedics in the program, Bill Hetherington, sparked a friendship with Mable.

The 100-year-old woman shared stories with Hetherington about her hometown in Nova Scotia.

After Mable passed away, her family found that she had been

keeping a diary.

Over and again, she wrote about how she couldn't wait for Tuesday.

"She really enjoyed speaking to them, and the social aspect," said Annette.

Mable moved to Mississauga in 1957 and worked at a Woolworth store in the area.

"Bill's mom used to take him there shopping," Annette said, explaining that the pair would talk about all sorts of things. "It was very special. They ended up having a connection."

Now, McMurrrough and the paramedic team are looking to expand the project.

"The calls to 911 have decreased," he said, explaining that Georgetown's numbers are down 20 per cent and Milton by 40 per cent. They are expanding to two sites in Oakville and hope to bring the services to Burlington.

"This was a good place to start a pilot," said McMurrrough, standing inside the lobby at the Georgetown building. "We're actually dealing with a lot of social issues. For seniors, when they feel isolated they tend to use more medical services."

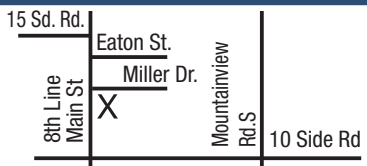


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