

Man says Tories mum on drug help program

By PAUL MITCHISON
Special to The Champion

A Burlington man thinks the provincial government is deliberately keeping quiet about a program saving him hundreds of dollars in drug fees, annually.

Gordon Bower said the Trillium Drug Program, for people of any age with unmanageable drug expenses, receives too little publicity. "I suspect the government doesn't want to pay if they can get away with it."

Prior to stumbling on information about the program in a news article about new drug user fees, he said no one told him he might be eligible for help.

"I have discussed the high cost of drugs with various medical professionals, including four doctors and four pharmacists, but not one mentioned the existence of this plan."

Mr. Bower, who is 62 and works part-time as an industrial consultant, runs up more than \$1,200 in prescription costs annually, for medications related to his heart. Without the program, he said he'd be hard-pressed to afford them.

Province says it's playing fair

David Ross, of the provincial Ministry of Health, said it's, "absolutely not true," the

Trillium Drug Plan is being kept quiet.

"Doctors have all received a mailout from the ministry, and all the pharmacists as well," said Mr. Ross. "We've even altered the deductible so another 140,000 people are eligible for the program."

Mr. Bower is convinced otherwise.

He's eligible for this year, but was too late to apply for benefits in 1995, even though he would have qualified. "I basically lost out last year because I was too late."

Mr. Bower said he was a strong supporter of the Mike Harris Common Sense Revolution, but is angry with the government over this. He's been to 14 pharmacies and never seen the Trillium Drug Program pamphlet on open display, though it was available from under the counter. And, he said, three of four personal friends in the health care field didn't know about it either.

"The inefficient, almost secretive way this program is being promoted, or I should say not promoted, by the Ontario Ministry of Health is completely unacceptable."

Mr. Bower and his 61-year-old wife were forced into early retirement and they don't have a pension. He doesn't yet qualify for the generous drug provisions of the Ontario Drug Benefit

Program for seniors.

Senior group tells members

The Canadian Association for Retired People, or CARP, advises its members about the Trillium Program. But Carol Libman, publicity director of the organization, agrees the provincial government doesn't seem to want to publicize it very much.

"Like a lot of things that cost money, they're letting you do your own research. They certainly don't deny it's there," said Ms Libman, whose organization advises its members about government programs.

For those who don't qualify for all the health care benefits given to people at age 65, the cost of drugs can be "devastating," and they tend to rely on pharmacists, doctors and others for advice. That can be a mistake, said Ms Libman.

"Ultimately, it's up to you to be aware of things like this, but if you don't have the chance to read the paper thoroughly and all the time, you could easily not know about it."

She said the program was introduced under the Bob Rae NDP government, and she credits Mr. Harris for keeping it. But she says it's up to people to do their homework if they want to benefit.

"It's quite true they don't send out a lot of

press releases telling people it's there," Ms Libman said. "They do it now and then, and probably hope they won't have to spend too much money on it."

Pamphlet in MPP office


A visit to the constituency office of Burlington MPP Cam Jackson turned up a pamphlet about the Trillium program.

It says that, after a family reaches its deductible limit, which depends on income, a person can receive back the extra cash paid out for prescription drugs.

For example, a single woman with no private drug plan, and an income of \$18,000, would have a deductible of \$478. If her drug costs were \$1,000, the Trillium program would reimburse the rest, minus a \$2 fee.

Anyone with questions is asked to call the Trillium program hotline at 1-800-575-5386. Mr. Bower said he became so frustrated with the automated phone system he ended up calling the Health Ministry to speak with an individual.

From April until the end of July this year, the government spent \$1.4 million on the Trillium drug program. The deductible for a single person with an annual income of \$6,500 or less was lowered from \$500 to \$350 on April 1.



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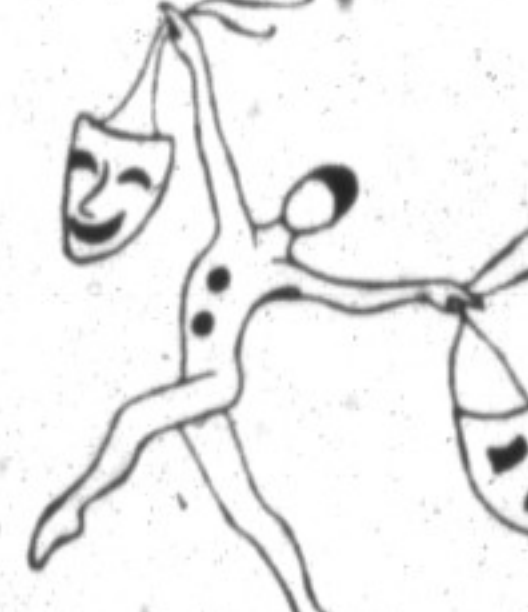
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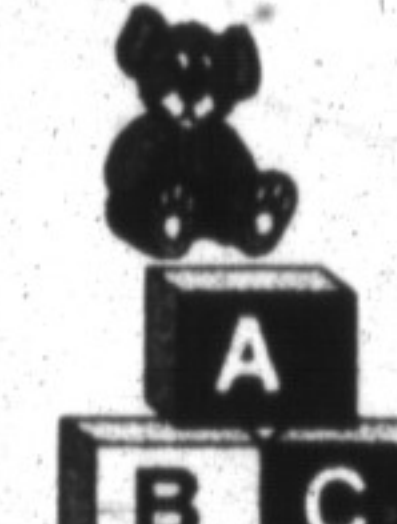


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