

Seniors' abuse hitting home

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

Elder abuse used to be the hidden crime.

People didn't want to think about seniors who were abused emotionally, financially or physically and it is still vastly under-reported.

However, there is now more awareness of the issue, according to Bonnie Selwood, director of client services with a portfolio in elder abuse for the Community Care Access Centre (CCAC).

People are becoming more aware of the issue in the same way they became aware of the toll taken by child abuse and drunk driving. However, unlike with other incidents of abuse, there is no legal requirement to report elder abuse.

There are a number of community resources to turn to for help. Among them are educational meetings such as a seminar being presented by the Stouffville Community Policing Centre at Eastern Gate Retirement Community Wednesday at 1 p.m.

One of the most insidious instances of elder abuse usually involves an adult child looking after an aging mother, while living in her house and using her money. As the mother's health declines and her needs increase, the adult child makes no effort to arrange for more care, in effect abusing the senior through lack of appropriate care as well as financially.

All too often, Ms Selwood has seen how the older woman is afraid to report abuse because she's afraid she'll lose both her home and her caregiver. In these cases, "it gets frustrating because your hands are tied and you can't do anything," Ms Selwood said.

"We hope that as awareness is enhanced that linkages with banks, lawyers and police will increase and we are going to be able to do a better job of intervening in a sensitive manner," Ms Selwood said.

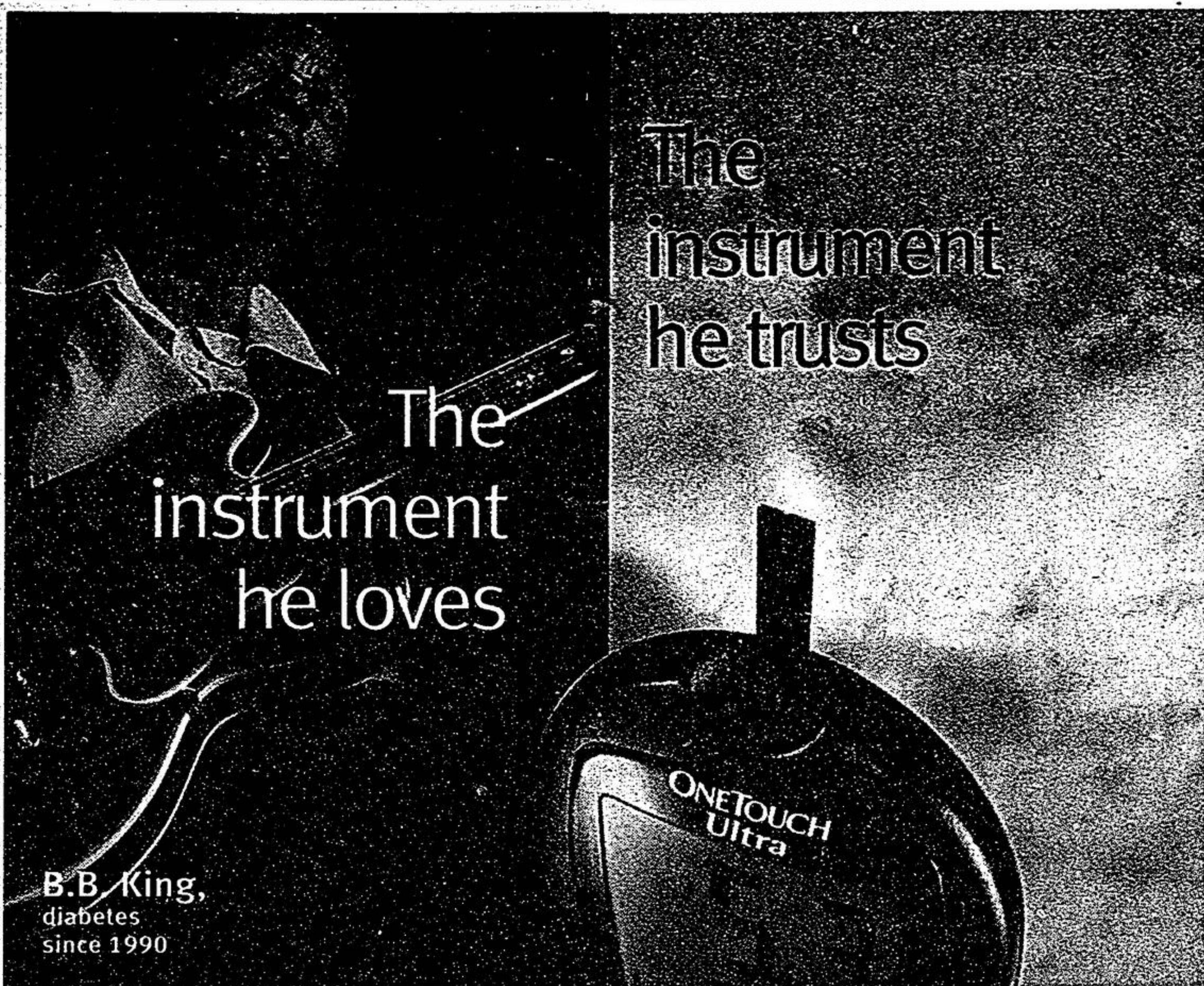
People who do report elder abuse are neighbours; family members, abused seniors themselves and care providers.

Wilf Morley, president of the Silver Jubilee Seniors' Club in Stouffville, said the issue hadn't come up among the club's members. But information on the issue has to be made available for seniors, he said.

Bloomington Cove, run by Specialty Care, has a zero tolerance policy on elder abuse and an emphasis on respecting residents' rights.

York Region Police have two officers trained in seniors services, who deal with elder abuse, York Region Police spokesperson Kathleen Griffin said.

To report elder abuse, call the Elder Abuse Resource Team from 8:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. seven days a week at 1-888-470-2222 for help. Information is also available from the Ontario Network for Prevention of Elder Abuse and the York Region Abuse Program at 905-853-3040 or 905-773-5706.



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