



MARCOS TOWNSEND THE GAZETTE

Quebec Lesbian Network's Diane Heffernan (left) and Renaud Paré, president of Aînés et retraités de la communauté, discuss a new report regarding the aging gay population in Canada and the difficulties they face in health and social services care.

# Tough to be gay and aging

## INCIDENTS OF IGNORANCE AND DISGUST

Study finds elderly homosexuals face particular problems in obtaining care

SUE MONTGOMERY  
THE GAZETTE

A doctor expressed disgust after discovering his elderly patient was gay.

A gay man carried his ailing partner into the washroom of an old folks home so the two could steal a hug away from the critical eyes of others.

A caregiver tried to impose her religious beliefs to "rid" an elderly patient of homosexuality.

These are just a few of the heartbreaking stories a research team from McGill University heard while looking into the health and social-service needs of aging gays and lesbians.

"These are real events that are happening," said Shari Brotman, a professor at McGill's School of Social Work.

"There's a strong mistrust and fear of the system, and (gay and lesbian elders) are very hesitant to seek out services."

The four-year study was based on 90 interviews with elders, caregivers and health and social-service providers in Vancouver, Montreal and Halifax.

Finding people to interview proved to be a challenge for the team, as elderly gays and lesbians in the health care system or old-age homes tend not to be "out."

As well, workers either said

they had no gay or lesbian patients or they treated everyone the same, so it didn't matter.

The researchers found health and social-service employees in Montreal had more education and awareness about gay and lesbian issues than their peers in the other cities studied.

They also found many seniors wanting to move to Montreal to

*"If you aren't safe in your own home, where are you safe?"*

SOCIAL WORKER SHARI BROTMAN

escape homophobia in other regions of North America.

Still, the researchers cited the need for training and policies, especially for workers coming into patients' homes.

"In the absence of formalized training or a set of standards in

caregiver organizations, it leaves it wide open for the caregivers' ignorance and prejudices to come shining through," Brotman said at a news-conference yesterday.

She told the story of one elderly man who had to hide all the photos of his dead partner before the caregiver arrived in his home.

"If you aren't safe in your own home, where are you safe?" Brotman said.

Children caring for aging gay or lesbian parents also expressed difficulties when it came to attending support groups. People either shunned them or assumed they were gay or lesbian themselves, Brotman said.

It is widely accepted that one in 10 Canadians is homosexual, and that rate applies to all age groups.

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