**Kitchissippi Men’s Book Club, April 2021**

***Neglected No More***

**The Urgent Need to Improve the Lives of Canada’s Elders in the Wake of a Pandemic**

**by André Picard**

Review by Alan Amey

Elder care in Canada is broken. The pandemic has exposed the longstanding weaknesses of how we deal with elders:

* over-concentration of services in big impersonal institutions rather than in the community;
* shortage of beds;
* high cost; generally low standards;
* shortages of staff; low pay; low prestige; training is difficult to find; must work in several part time jobs so that employers don’t pay benefits;
* lack of palliative care;
* large burden on family members in the home and lack of advocacy skills when the elder is institutionalized;
* lack of standards, inspection and enforcement, multiple infractions by companies or non-profits without consequences;
* old facilities with crowded rooms and poor heating/cooling;
* lack of human and intellectual stimulation.

These cumulative deficits exploded during the pandemic and hastened the death of thousands of victims.

This neglect has continued for decades with multiple provincial parties studying the problem intensively (150 studies), making hundreds of recommendations but implementation is spotty. This collective shame has many responsible parties but nobody is taking responsibility.

Better examples of elder care are available in the Nordic countries with Denmark being the gold standard. Community-based services with good staffing levels are key to making elders comfortable and may cost less than housing them in large institutions. For the latter, Sunnyside Hospital is the gold standard in Canada.

Picard’s recommendations for initial reform are:

* aging in place, ie. home, with more personal support workers delivering home care;
* increase in quantity, quality, prestige and pay of workers in this sector;
* family caregivers need more support including financial and navigating the system;
* increasing government funding all round;
* better palliative care;
* an overall structure, with accountability and regulation with consequences for shortcomings; reporting at political levels.

While the overall picture has some bright spots, especially for those with money to buy the best care possible, the majority of elder care provided is insufficient, too costly and of low quality.