

FOCUS ON

Generations

THE VANCOUVER SUN

DIRECTED EDITORIAL

WEDNESDAY,
MAY 21, 2014

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MAKING THE MOST OF LIFE



Yukiko Tosa, 62, left, pays a visit with her 88-year-old aunt, Mary Takimoto, at Takimoto's new care-facility surroundings in Burnaby where she now enjoys activities and companionship.

Representation Agreement a lifeline

GORD SCOTT

VANCOUVER SUN

After years of trying to get her aging aunt to accept her help, Yukiko Tosa, 62, got a call from Surrey Memorial Hospital in April 2013 that changed both their lives.

"My aunt is a very stubborn, determined woman," Tosa said in a recent telephone interview. "Any time I tried to talk about wills or anything, she would get uptight and say, 'I'm not dead yet.'"

Mary Takimoto had been widowed in the 1970s and has since

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Digital aids to rescue: C10



lived in her Surrey home alone, growing increasingly reclusive.

"She didn't want any help, and she wouldn't let me or the neighbours into the house," Tosa said.

Unbeknownst to Tosa, by last year Takimoto could no longer cook for herself and had taken to visiting the local McDonald's three to four times a day. It was there that she grew faint and had

to accept some help.

"One of the staff took her home; opened the door, realized how horrible it was, and called 911," Tosa said.

The paramedics "had a heart attack" at the state of the house, Tosa said, and social workers called "the only phone number (Takimoto) could recall."

That call and her aunt's subsequent diagnosis of dementia threw Tosa's life into turmoil.

"She had changed the locks twice since she'd given me a key, hadn't paid the telephone bill since January — hadn't paid income tax, ever — had no will, no

power of attorney," Tosa said.

"It was overwhelming."

A social worker handed Tosa a Representation Agreement and the clouds began to lift.

"I couldn't pay the bills without a Representation Agreement," Tosa said. "I thought: I'm a librarian, why don't I know this?"

Nidus helped Tosa through a few false starts, and by balancing her full-time job (her husband is retired and the couple has no children) and attending to her aunt's affairs, she managed to get Takimoto into a care facility three blocks from her home.

The experience has made her

an advocate for the early adoption of Representation Agreements.

"If someone doesn't want to get a lawyer, you can even complete them with your own friends," Tosa said. "It isn't as formal."

"My husband and I are going to do it. We've got to at our age."

As for Tosa's aunt, Takimoto has settled nicely into her new surroundings and now enjoys activities and companionship.

She will occasionally ask Tosa if she will ever return home.

When told no, she offers up one response: "You mean I don't have to worry?"

I couldn't pay the bills without (an agreement).
... I'm a librarian, why don't I know this?

More than a will on the way to effective personal planning

>> NIDUS PERSONAL PLANNING RESOURCE CENTRE IS FOR HELP 'FOR WHEN YOU'RE LIVING'

GORD SCOTT

VANCOUVER SUN

The most important personal planning decision B.C. residents face may be the one they're not making.

"People absolutely do not know and are not being told that there's more to do than make a will," says Joanne Taylor of the Nidus Personal Planning Resource Centre.

Taylor is the sparkplug behind this Vancouver non-profit that was established in 1995. Nidus is out to help an aging population use a new

The Representation Agreement, more than 20 years in the making, helps residents make their own choices when it comes to personal care and finances.

tool — the Representation Agreement — to plan for their future personal- and health-care needs.

Making a firm distinction between estate planning — "for

after death" — and personal planning — "for when you're alive" — Taylor says that many B.C. residents don't encounter the subject of Representation Agreements until they're

involved in a crisis, like dementia or a fall with "parents, an aunt, an uncle or neighbour."

"Then, it's obviously the children who get involved in the Representation Agreement," Taylor says.

"It doesn't take long before people say, 'Hey, this applies to me, too.'"

The legal documents are unique to B.C. — Taylor knows of no others on the planet — and are the product of more than 20 years of work between community advocacy groups like the BC Association for Community Living, Alzheimer Society of BC and the provincial



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Filling out and sending in a Representation Agreement means you are making choices for your own personal care.

government.

By downloading, filling out and registering forms, residents choose who will speak for them — and on what issues — if they become unable to do so.

"Personal care can mean

so many things," Taylor says. "Where you live. Your diet and activities. Your hair, kind of razor. It's all about your values and identity."

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FACT 1

Representation Agreements, encountered by most only when a crisis occurs, are a solution to issues that emerge as people become hampered in their ability to speak for themselves — and are only available in B.C.

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Representation Agreements set out who will speak for you, and on which aspect of your life.

FROM PAGE C7

Shifts in privacy, consent legislation make individual choices paramount

The legal documents can also cover financial affairs.

"People really get excited when they see this is about quality of life," Taylor says.

Nidus has a selection of forms and a wealth of information available for download online. The group allows offers advice on how the agreement should be set up, and a registry — to go online this year — that permits changes to and backups on the agreements, as well as controlled access for health and other care providers.

Taylor cites the Boomer generation's proactive nature for the development of this approach to personal planning.

"(They) are planners," she says. "They've been to all these retirement planning seminars."

The previous generation

People really get excited when they see this is about quality of life!

arrangements," Taylor warns.

"If you don't, it's not going to be automatic."

Taylor has had many tell her they have spoken to their family doctor about their wishes.

"I tell them that doctor won't be in the hospital, and (hospital staff) won't call that doctor," she says.

Expectations have changed, Taylor says. Health care, for instance, now "has to mesh based as much on my values as medical opinion."

"The good news," Taylor says, "is that Representation Agreements mean you make the decision; you take some responsibility."

Forms, advice and the chance to make an appointment to learn about Representation Agreements can be found at www.nidus.ca

grew up "in a time when they knew their neighbours, they knew their bank managers ... they helped each other," Taylor says.

In this shifting era of privacy and consent legislation: "You've got to make your own