

# THIRD AGE BARRIE SENIORS EXPLORE ADDICTION

JANIS RAMSAY  
jramsay@simcoe.com

A number of retirees are learning about pain management and addiction issues thanks to a Third Age Barrie education workshop.

Third Age Barrie is a group of retirees inspired to continue learning and the "Understanding Addiction" series is exploring the opioid crisis here in the city.

"We recognize the opioid situation in Barrie is pretty critical and we certainly wanted to hear from the folks who professionally and through lived experience have a credible position on it," Third Age Barrie liaison Deb Woods said.

The series dives further into topics such as harm reduction and anti-stigma, treating addiction, the tobacco endgame and cannabis basics.

"Every year, we survey our audience to hear what

they're thinking about and what they'd like to know more about," Woods said. "When we were planning this, the survey indicated mental health in various aspects was a big deal."

And addiction can go hand-in-hand with mental health, she said.

Woods said the goal isn't to take a position on the subject, but to share more information with the audience.

"As far as opioids go, they transcend socio-economic status and age. A lot of the issues from opioids have stemmed from prescription painkillers," Woods said. "And seniors are certainly in that market."

Seniors with chronic back pain or who are recovering from surgery want to know more about what is being prescribed and why, she said.

"Medication overload is a concern, especially in the



Janis Ramsay/Torstar

Third Age Barrie board members Tom Gerry (left) and Deb Woods are presenting an Understanding Addiction series for retirees at Grace United Church this month.

later years," Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit public health nurse Sarah Orr-Shaw said. "As your body

ages, your body changes, and less of a drug can create more of a reaction than it used to."

The health unit is just one of the guest speakers sharing information about addiction.

"Seniors are very concerned about pain, because as we age, we get more aches and pains. Quite often, it can become severe, chronic pain, which will limit mobility, quality of life, sleep, cognitive function and your mental health," Orr-Shaw said.

Unfortunately, pain is not being examined as a root cause of the opioid addiction, she said.

Some seniors might turn to alcohol or pain medication after losing a spouse, a friend or even losing their independence such as a driver's licence or job.

Other seniors are frightened of addiction and may choose not to take prescribed pain meds. Seniors should be respectful of their medication, but there can be a quality of life on prescriptions, she said, adding that knowledge is power.

This Third Age Barrie addiction workshop series is already sold out, but more topics are planned in the future. For details, visit [thirdagebarrie.ca](http://thirdagebarrie.ca).