

Cycling with our seniors— It's transformational!

Lauren Lypchuk, MD,
CCFP (retired!)



Lauren piloting Frederick and Gladys along the Okanagan Rail Trail, August 2019.

Throughout my 30-year medical career, I often reflected about my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, elderly friends, and elderly patients—what is it like to age and experience loss of mobility, chronic illness, and pain, combined with the numerous other life challenges and changes that come with time?

For our elderly, many of these challenges and changes lead to social isolation, loneliness, and depression. For many, their outings are often the necessity trips to see us (their doctors), to go to the pharmacist, to get groceries, or to attend other appointments. I have had elderly patients tell me their doctor's appointment was the social highlight of the month!

Our communities are generally geared toward the younger and more able, and our elderly tend to be marginalized. We see this every day. We especially saw it during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was during a period of reflection, with retirement approaching, that a 3-minute event captured my attention and heart. In 2017, I came across a short YouTube

documentary produced by the BBC called *Amazing Humans*. It told the story of Fraser, a 21-year-old medical student in Scotland, who was taking elderly people for free rides in the community on a specialized e-assist bike called a trishaw. Fraser's passengers sat together in the front carriage, and Fraser peddled them around while they merrily chatted away. Fraser was part of a program called Cycling Without Age, which began in Denmark in 2012 with one elderly gentleman being taken out for a ride. Cycling Without Age has since grown to a worldwide volunteer program, with chapters in 52 countries at last count.

I was transfixed, watching the video many times over, and knew immediately my community (Vernon and surrounds) would be the perfect place for this program. I was hooked! My husband, Ward, agreed, and, with his support, I applied to Denmark and was accepted into the program as a volunteer affiliate. And so began the process of fundraising, developing the program, and bringing Cycling Without Age to Vernon. The timing was perfect, as I wound down

my work to part-time in 2019 and then retired at the end of 2021.

The Vernon community has fully embraced our program. Colleagues, friends, and charitable groups have been phenomenally encouraging, excited about the program, and supportive. As a result, we have raised over \$80 000, allowing us to purchase three trishaw bikes and the accessories needed to get our program rolling. Vernon and Coldstream Cycling Without Age officially started taking elderly passengers for rides in June 2019. We are a 100% volunteer organization. Despite a 2-year break due to the pandemic, we were able to restart in 2022 and are cycling strong in 2023, 7 days/week, May through October, with 45 volunteers taking people out for free rides. We have now taken 1000+ seniors on our trishaws, covering over 9000 km and giving our seniors an opportunity they otherwise would never have—visiting and experiencing local sites they would never have access to, out from the confines of their residences.

We meet many people along the way (I counted more than 200 one day)—kids, teens, adults, people on bikes, people walking dogs, and people in cars, often waving, cheering us on, and wanting to chat. We have had teens call our seniors “cool dudes.” The effect on our elderly passengers is often transformational. We routinely hear how valued they feel, and their comments are so telling: “I feel like the queen.” “This is the best thing since sliced bread!” “I haven't had this much attention since I was a kid.” “I feel worthy and loved.” “This is magnificent!” We have helped our seniors celebrate 60th wedding anniversaries, 90th and 100th birthdays, and even their last outing as part of a palliative gift while on our trishaws.

One of my passengers cried as we cycled along Kalamalka Lake on our beautiful Okanagan Rail Trail. It was her first outing in 2 years, and despite seeing photos of the trail, reading about it, and donating to its development, she never dreamt she would get to experience it. And here she was seeing it on our trishaw bike!

There is so much we can offer our communities if we have the time and choose to get involved. It doesn't have to be medically related or large in scope. Like many experiences throughout my medical career, I have found putting this program together and taking seniors out for rides to be incredibly humbling, gratifying, and heartwarming. Our volunteers routinely say this too, that it is even better than they imagined.

A bit of kindness goes a long way. The experience we give in providing trishaw rides to our elderly passengers we get back in spades with the stories and laughter we hear and the smiles we see. Life doesn't end at 80. Our elderly are important. Someday we will hopefully be there too.

Cycling Without Age's motto is "The right to wind in your hair." There is a lot of truth to this!

To find out more about the program, visit <https://cyclingwithoutage.ca>. To get in touch with the Vernon chapter, email cyclingwithoutage.vernon.bc@gmail.com.



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Read the article: bcmj.org/news/new-self-screening-program-detect-cervical-cancer



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Dr Mary Conley

The inspiring life of an incredible doctor, artist, author, volunteer, and teacher.

Konia Trouton, MD, CCFP, MPH, FCFP

Dr Mary Conley received an honorary Doctor of Science degree from the University of New Brunswick on 17 May 2023. This is an incredible honor for an incredible woman. Dr Conley also holds a Bachelor of Science from the University of New Brunswick (1966) and a Doctor of Medicine from the University of British Columbia (1975). She attended the Honolulu Academy of the Arts and the Vancouver School of Art between degrees, achieving excellence in both. Devoting herself to both art and science has been her joy, one she shares through teaching.

Dr Conley began her medical career a few years after decriminalization of contraception and abortion in Canada in 1969.

Dr Trouton is a clinical professor in the Department of Family Practice at the University of British Columbia and a clinical associate at Women's College Hospital in Toronto. She completed her medical training at Queen's University and her residency in Calgary, and she holds a Master of Public Health from Harvard. She co-founded the Vancouver Island Women's Clinic in 2003. In addition to reproductive health care, she participates in many research and teaching initiatives. In 2016, she added MAID to her practice and co-founded the Canadian Association of MAID Assessors and Providers, currently serving as its president.

This article has been peer reviewed.



Dr Mary Conley.

When she began practice, she was motivated to work in these fields; at that time, women still needed to make their case to terminate a pregnancy to a three-physician hospital-based committee, waiting on their consensus before proceeding with an abortion. Dr Conley opted to step forward and train to do the procedure and sought training with Dr Henry Morgentaler in Montreal in 1980, the first doctor outside of Quebec to do so. Both are family doctors, as are most of the physicians who provide abortion services in Canada. Dr Morgentaler, along with two other family physicians, challenged the Supreme Court and won, establishing today's reality that a decision about ending a pregnancy is made between the patient and their physician. Dr Conley worked through this transition, providing care in the operating rooms of Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria until her retirement.

With a passion to ensure that women could decide if and when to have children, Dr Conley worked tirelessly, and under extreme personal risk to her life, to ensure access to safe abortion services was available on Vancouver Island. She was threatened, bullied, harassed, and picketed but still managed to shine through with her positive attitude, kind words, and careful procedures. When Dr Gary Romalis was shot for providing abortions in Vancouver