

Victoria film series offers insight to dementia caregivers

What: Insights Film Series Where: Eric Martin Theatre, Royal Jubilee Hospital South entrance, 1900 block Fort St. When: Wednesdays, 7 p.m., until Dec. 10 Registration: moviemonday.ca

Michael D. Reid
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Judi Dench and Jim Broadbent star in *Iris*, showing Oct. 22 at the Royal Jubilee Hospital's Eric Martin Pavilion in Victoria.

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Info: 250-595-3542

With recent news stories reporting how two former B.C. premiers, Bill Bennett and Dave Barrett, are suffering from dementia, a new film course and series on the topic couldn't be more timely.

Curator Bruce Saunders says Insights, which began Wednesday, focuses on the emotional and practical challenges facing caregivers to people experiencing Alzheimer's disease, other forms of dementia and issues related to aging. It's a return of Saunders' series that last year explored mental health issues using film as a catalyst for learning through his popular Movie Monday program.

While this year's edition focuses on professional development, Saunders said it should also interest the public.

Indeed, with nearly 800,000 Canadians living with dementia and increased calls for the federal government to develop a national dementia strategy, it's an epidemic few haven't been touched by.

"It's hitting so many of us. Even AC/DC founding member Malcolm Young is out with it," Saunders said. "Our boomer population is facing this big-time these days."

Saunders negotiated this troubling territory himself after his mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and then suffered a stroke.

Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter, last night's première showing, focused on a woman who becomes her mother's caregiver and wrestles with the issue of whether to move her to a care facility.

"It shows an example of how it can be a relief for all, especially the person struggling with confusion and memory loss, to be in a more suitable setting," said Saunders, tipping his hat to assistance agencies such as the Alzheimer's Society of B.C.

The opening night film was paired with Grief, Loss and Dementia, an Island Health-produced documentary.

Insights can be experienced as a full course for \$32.50, with a discounted rate for those joining in progress. There is also a drop-in rate (\$8 per film) at the Wednesday night screenings.

Local resource experts will appear as guests, and dialogue among participants is encouraged, Saunders said. A certificate of attendance will be provided for those seeking continuing education credit, and to benefit staff of agencies such as Beacon Home Services for potential reimbursement of registration costs.

The community health workers agency views the Movie Monday series as a creative way to supplement training, said Wendy Hammell, manager of special projects for Beacon Community Services.

"Going to a movie brings caregivers and colleagues together for an enjoyable social time," she said. "But even more than that, discussing the films and how they depict dementia may also spark attendees to share their own perspectives and knowledge."

Saunders said his aim is to reach a wide audience, including viewers who haven't yet connected with the psychological support necessary for survival.

Special guests and moderators include front-line workers like occupational therapist Phyllis Williams.

Other films include *Iris* (Oct. 22), starring Judi Dench as a writer stricken with dementia in her twilight years; *Alive Inside* (Nov. 12), a documentary on Dan Cohen, the founder of the non-profit Music & Memory; and *Still Mine* (Nov. 26), starring James Cromwell as a New Brunswick man who builds a dream home for his wife as her dementia sets in.

The series closes Dec. 10 with *The Genius of Marian*, about a family coming to terms with Alzheimer's disease when its matriarch is diagnosed at age 61.

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