



## MDs hope to cash in on boomers' desire to take control of their health

Heather Kent

When Dr. Stan Karon invited an old acquaintance, Dr. Howard Koseff, for a swim at a Vancouver pool 2 years ago, the pair had no inkling that their poolside chats would lead to the private clinic — Strategic Health — that they opened in January. The doctors, who attended the same medical school in South Africa but did not meet until a decade ago in Saskatchewan, are hoping to fill a gap in preventive health care by offering a counselling and physical checkup service with a holistic bent. This type of preventive medical counselling is not funded by British Columbia's medical services plan.

Koseff, who takes a "very open-minded approach to complementary and alternative medicine," says he is also "very open to any form of stress relief that helps a person. If people tell me that they really enjoy aromatherapy, I know that it does not cause harm and is very relaxing, and I would encourage that particular form of therapy."

The physicians stress that they will not act as primary care providers and will refer patients back to their family doctors if health problems are discovered.

Koseff moved to BC from Saskatchewan 6 years ago and spent 5 years in family practice. Karon, meanwhile, has run a private clinic for visiting foreign sailors since he arrived in Vancouver from Moose Jaw, Sask., 3 years ago.

Koseff left his family practice more than a year ago to re-examine his life and career direction. Immersing himself in reading and Internet-based research, he says he began to understand for the first time the importance of a holistic approach to patient care.

"I decided that if I was going to stay with medicine, it would have to be the kind of practice I was passionate about, that made sense to me, where I felt I was doing something that made a difference. In Western medicine we have lost the art of listening to people and their stories. For me . . . health is about looking forward, and what we are trying to do here is get people interested in making changes for the future, learning to shift perspective somewhat so that they can approach health in a proactive way."

Karon's motivation for opening the clinic was based, at least in part, on his father's multiple heart attacks, which he says were clearly related to stress and dietary factors. As well, even though he was "very happy" in his family practice in Moose Jaw, he felt that "very few visits really made a long-term difference to people. I used to find that a few things made a big difference — putting women on hormone replacement therapy, talking to people about smoking ces-



Heather Kent photo

**Drs. Stan Karon (left) and Howard Koseff: 2 consultations a day**

sation and putting teenage girls on the birth control pill."

In his new practice, says Karon, the consultations are so labour intensive "that you can only do 2 of them a day." Most patients refer themselves and come in for an initial 1-hour history-taking session. A physical examination may take half an hour, followed by laboratory tests. The patients return to review the results, and receive a preventive health plan.

The doctors charge \$180 per hour, an amount based on the British Columbia Medical Association's recommended rate of \$93.60 per half hour for preventive medical counselling. A comprehensive consultation could include 3 hours of physician time, says Karon, at a cost of \$540. Laboratory testing would add another \$250 to the bill, with stress testing (\$88) and x-rays (about \$30) bringing the final total close to \$1000.

Karon and Koseff are equal partners in the enterprise, which for now is operating from Karon's existing practice offices.

Koseff says Strategic Health's patients have represented a cross-section of the population. "We are interested in seeing anybody who is interested in taking control of their health," he adds, but the physicians are particularly anxious to attract baby boomers so that time-consuming lifestyle changes, such as diet modification, will have time to take effect as patients approach old age.

Both doctors say they are off to a good start with the business. "We believe in what we are doing," says Koseff. "I'm very passionate about this and if I'm doing the right thing and if I believe in what I'm doing, it's going to work out."

*Heather Kent is a Vancouver journalist.*