

Going out of the region for health care? Call Steve!

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CASCAPEDIA: - Travelling outside the region for health care can be intimidating and stressful, but there is help and support. Steve Guimond has been working for Travel4Health, a service established in March 2016 by the Community Health and Social Services Network in partnership with a host of regional anglophone associations including CASA, Vision Gaspé-Percé Now, Council of Anglophone Magdalen Islanders, and the Coasters Association from the Lower North Shore.

The funding for the position has come from the Quebec Community Health Foundation.

Mr. Guimond offers a range of services and supports for people who have to travel to the Quebec City area for health care. Some have to travel more than 1,000 kilometres to receive the medical care they

need.

"We survived COVID and we are still here!" Mr. Guimond told SPEC during a recent interview. He noted that before his position as Patient Navigator was established, the regional groups used a printed toolkit to provide patients with information about the hospitals they were scheduled to visit and find travel services and accommodations in Quebec City.

The toolkits may still be available, but the online site at <https://www.travel4health.ca/> has a host of information that can be easily accessed and walks patients through many of the issues they may face while travelling to and staying in Quebec City.

"People come to the city for a range of treatments," Mr. Guimond explained to SPEC, "Probably number one is oncology (cancer treatments) and number two cardiology (to see heart specialists) but we also have a lot of people coming for surgery, dialysis, and MRI

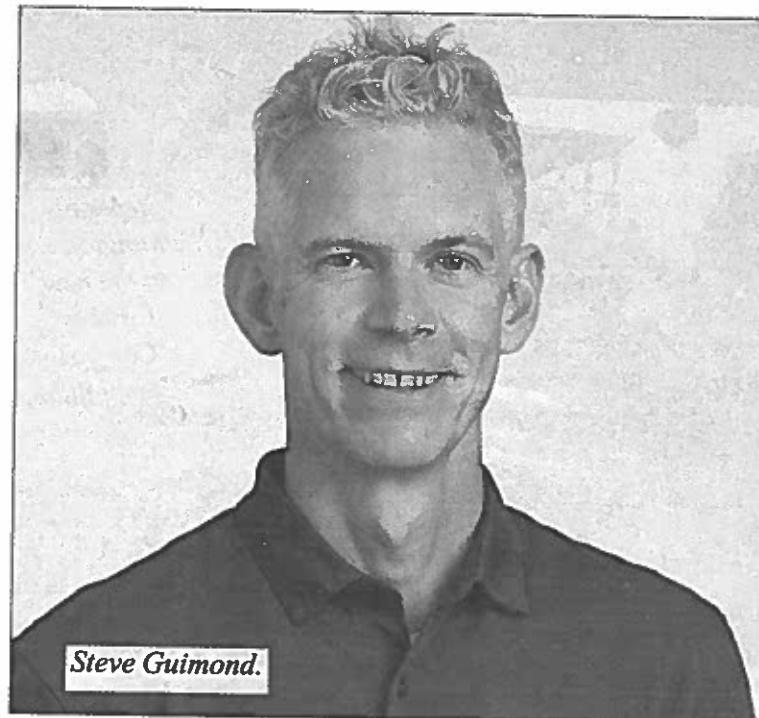


Photo: Courtesy of Steve Guimond

scans. Many regions do not yet have MRI machines."

Mr. Guimond noted that Gaspesian patients perhaps face the most challenging travel situation, as from most other regions, air travel is relatively simple. "What people from the Gaspé Coast have to go through to get here is unbeliev-

able," he said, "Ten to twelve hours on a bus or in a car... two full days to get here and return, and sometimes the medical appointment lasts just 15 or 20 minutes. If changes were made, the health care system could save a lot of time and money for everyone."

Mr. Guimond mentioned

that many patients are not travelling alone, but have been allowed to bring someone to accompany them. However, eligibility to cover those expenses varies a great deal from region to region. "I sometimes see people here who really should not be travelling alone."

There is also a serious loneliness factor for some who have to stay a long time in the city. "I am currently helping a woman who is in the hospital from May until July 3 and then must stay another 100 days in Quebec City for follow-up treatments. She also needs to remain in isolation. In cases like that, I check in regularly on people."

He noted that representatives of the English-speaking community are working at the level of the regional access committees to highlight the issues that some patients are going through. So far, Mr. Guimond has served almost 500

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patients, with support offered to just over 100 people per year, sometimes for multiple trips to the city. Altogether 1,036 interventions have been undertaken.

There have been considerable improvements already to the way patients from the regions are being treated. For example, in the past, patients who had been transported by the health care system to Quebec City were sometimes required to find their own way home. Now, those brought in by the medivac transporters are also sent home that way.

Mr. Guimond also noted a significant increase in the ability of Quebec City hospitals to respond in English to the needs of his clients. "Things have changed a lot in the local hospitals. It's never been much of an issue with doctors, because many of them have trained in English. Now at the nursing level, the younger generation of recent recruits enjoy speaking English... and I find that the staff here really have the interests of the patients at heart. They do an incredible job in difficult circumstances, and that is not always fully acknowledged."

However, a problem that requires a solution is the lack of English-language printed material about things like preparation for surgery and post-surgery instructions. "What's frustrating is that all this material exists in the English institutions in Montreal. But we are told that the documentation is institution-specific, so it is not being shared."

He said a major challenge that affects all people throughout the system is the long waiting lists for treatment.

For more information about the services he can offer, you can contact Mr. Guimond directly at 418-932-0095 or by email at navigator@qchfoundation.org. Don't forget to check out <https://www.travel4health.ca/> to help you organize your trip.