

Personal Support Workers: Barriers to Resident Care

The Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care at the Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging, in partnership with Overlap Associates, hosted digital workshops to better understand issues facing Personal Support Workers (PSWs).

These workshops directly engaged PSWs around three topics: Barriers to Resident Care, Safety and Well-Being at Work, and Respect and Feeling Valued. A human-centred design was used with PSWs to explore problems and solutions to recruitment and retention in the long-term care (LTC) sector through their lived and professional experience.

Workshop Findings

The first collaborative PSW session focused on Barriers to Resident Care. Below are the main findings.

BARRIERS TO RESIDENT CARE

- Poor communication
- Policy and staffing changes because of COVID-19
- No time or capacity for the unexpected
- Physical exertion leading to burnout
- Lack of training for actual workload and demands
- Challenges between team members and “that’s not my job” attitude
- Not enough time to provide good care
- Not enough team members to provide holistic care
- More residents with high needs, language barriers, and behaviour challenges
- Heavy workloads and more residents to care for within limited time than is possible for one PSW

PSWS DESCRIBE AN IDEAL VISION OF RESIDENT CARE

- More team members to improve care
- Time to provide holistic care for body, mind, and soul - the “extras”
- More time for interactions and building relationships with residents
- More full-time roles for PSWs (instead of part-time)
- More time to support resident mental health during COVID-19
- A PSW shift specifically to support bathing

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

PSWs were asked to develop solutions to some of the most pressing issues they face. They provided the following ideas based on their lived and professional experience.

- Team-building activities for team members
- Better communication between shifts
- Role reversal with management
- Morale-boosting activities
- New team member buddy system
- More team members
- Training plan for new team members
- More full-time positions and benefits
- Realistic training in school
- Family members helping with resident care
- Team members enabled to help with PSW tasks
- Different PSW roles to help with resident needs

While exploring potential solutions, we asked PSWs to prototype a few solutions. Here is an example of one potential solution: **Training Plan for New Team Members**

- Mandatory requirements for PSW training, on topics including dementia, crisis prevention intervention, mental health, and substance abuse.
- Mandatory requirements for on-going training every few years on new topics relevant to resident care.
- Standard system for disciplinary actions, and recognition for outstanding performance across the field.

“Most days we struggle by not having enough hands to do our job the proper way, we are always on the clock, this is not the way we should be doing our job, our residents need emotional help and require time.”

In an online survey, we asked PSWs...

IN MY LTC HOME, THERE IS A GOOD RATIO OF PSWs TO RESIDENTS



79% disagree or strongly disagree

THE EXPECTATIONS ON ME AND MY ROLE ARE REASONABLE



63% disagree or strongly disagree

THE NEEDS OF MY RESIDENTS ARE NOT MANAGEABLE



55% agree or strongly agree

OUR THREE FOCUS TOPICS

- 1 Barriers to Resident Care**
Exploring how barriers impact the role and expectations placed on PSWs
- 2 Safety and Well-Being at Work**
Exploring how workplace demands, abuse and discrimination impact PSWs
- 3 Respect and Feeling Valued**
Exploring how not feeling respected, valued or respected affects the well-being of PSWs