

Personal Support Workers: Safety and Well-Being at Work

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 second collaborative PSW session focused on Safety and Well-Being at Work. Below are the main findings.

CHALLENGES TO SAFETY AND WELL-BEING AT WORK

- Inconsistent enforcement of policy
- Not enough team members for resident needs
- Residents with higher / more complex needs
- COVID-19: uncertainty of contagion, inconsistent use of PPE/rules, challenging family demands
- Not enough support, recognition, or follow-through from management
- Aggression and abuse from some residents and family members (discrimination and racism)
- Under-trained staff and lack of continuity of care can lead to injuries
- Overworked team members
- Emotional safety threatened by bullying, racism, etc
- Team dynamics - bullying, discrimination, cliques

PSWS DESCRIBE AN IDEAL VISION OF SAFETY AND WELL-BEING IN THE WORKPLACE

- Having benefits at work
- Having trust in colleagues to do things safely and well
- Lighter workload because of more team members
- Pride and enjoyment of work
- Supportive management that responds to problems
- No bullying, racism, or discrimination
- Having and using the right equipment and resources to stay safe (lifts, PPE, clear policies on COVID-19 changes, etc.)
- Feeling acknowledged
- Not feeling run-down when leaving work

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.

- Balance workload to consider residents with higher needs
- PSW suggestion system for management decisions
- Communication training and supports for teams
- Cultural and anti-racism training
- Working in pairs whenever possible
- More understanding / empathy between experienced and new PSWs
- Management present on the floor to see what it's like
- Management taking role with managing residents with responsive behaviours
- Policy and consistent disciplinary actions against bullying, racism, and discrimination between PSWs
- Team-building to build stronger relationships with team and management
- Management leading with respect, acknowledgement, and positivity
- Put management in the residents' place
- Mandatory training - crisis intervention, mental health, substance abuse, etc.
- Offer more full-time positions and benefits

While exploring potential solutions, we asked PSWs to prototype a few solutions. Here is an example of one potential solution: PSW Buddy System

- Mandatory requirement for all new PSWs to a LTC home to "buddy" or shadow a more senior PSW team member
- The purpose of the PSW Buddy System is primarily for safety and to help PSWs manage workloads
- All care communities function a bit differently, this system will also allow new and senior PSWs to share learnings, culture and expectations of the role at the home

It was proposed that a buddy system may help to develop a safe, more supportive work environment, while employing a team-based approach to care for residents and help manage workloads.

In an online survey, we asked PSWs...

MY WORK IS
PHYSICALLY
DIFFICULT



74%
strongly agree

MY WORK IS
EMOTIONALLY
DIFFICULT



64%
strongly agree

IN MY LTC
HOME, WE
HAVE ENOUGH
STAFF TO
WORK
SAFELY AND
COMFORTABLY



78% disagree or
strongly disagree

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

Read the full Report
clri-ltc.ca/PSW-Report