

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE IN LONG-TERM CARE



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Enhancing Life

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Ontario's long-term care homes provide care and support to more than 115,000 people and their families every year.¹ Long-term care homes provide 24/7 nursing care and supervision, primary medical care, help with daily activities and interests, and a safe, caring home environment. The vast majority of people who live in long-term care have some form of cognitive impairment and physical frailty, along with other chronic health conditions.¹

It's important to remember that as a team (staff) member, you work where the residents live – in their home. It is a place where friendships are built with residents and team (staff) members, treasured possessions are held, music is played and a variety of activities are enjoyed everyday. It is a place where life happens and journeys carry on.

The role of a team member in long-term care is to support both quality care and quality of life. Residents still have hopes, dreams and aspirations for a full and meaningful life. While working with residents in long-term care, it is important that team members communicate and approach care and support in ways that are respectful, flexible, creative and nurturing. Here are some strategies for person-centred interactions with residents:

- Recognition – getting to know the person for the unique individual that he or she is; showing the person respect (e.g., greeting the person by name, using eye contact, actively communicating with and listening to the person).
- Synchronizing to the person's reality – identifying, understanding, and aligning oneself with the person's reality or perception of the moment; sharing that moment with the person.
- Validation – acknowledging the person's emotions and responding with respect and empathy.
- Collaboration – working with the person rather than for the person; supporting the person to use their abilities and to have a say in decisions.
- Facilitation – enabling and supporting the person to do what he or she otherwise would not be able to do; creating opportunities for meaning and purpose.
- Going with the flow – adjusting/readjusting to the needs, preferences, and desires of the person.
- Flexible living – honouring the daily rhythms and life patterns of the person.²

The culture in long-term care involves broadening our attention from solely focusing on our elders' medical/clinical needs to a more holistic approach that includes supporting those aspects of life that bring joy, meaning, and purpose.

Barry Barkan sums it up nicely. He says:

“Our task is simple. It is to build communities in which each and every person matters. In which we are all connected to one another. And it is even deeper than that. In which we are all connected to the living planet and the legacy that we are going to leave for future generations. Our mission is to create the culture of aging in which we all want to age, despite whatever vicissitudes come along in the journey of our own aging.”³

References

1. Canadian Institute for Health Information (2018). Continuing Care Reporting System: Profile of Residents in Continuing Care Facilities 2017–2018. Ottawa: CIHI.
2. Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging. (2017). LIVING the Dementia Journey: Fostering Community through Authentic Care Partnerships.
3. Barry Barkan, Pioneer Network. From keynote address at 2014 Walk With Me Conference.



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