Relationally Speaking: Focusing on Wellness to forward Culture Change Journeys in Canadian Long-Term Care Homes

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Culture Change

Aims & Process**
- Enhancing care experience for residents including persons with dementia, family members, and staff
- Appreciating and building on strengths to build capacity

Introduction

The culture change movement in long-term care (LTC) homes is steadily gaining momentum across Canada. The movement focuses on transforming the medical/institutional culture within LTC settings to one that embraces relational caring principles and supports living life to the fullest. Instead of viewing LTC homes as places of death and dying, a relational approach nurtures living and wellness. Data from multiple sources suggest four key markers of wellness including: a well home, well relationships, personal well-being, and activities that are meaningful for living well. This conceptual paper draws on findings from a two-year participatory action research study that brought residents, family members, and staff together within a LTC home to explore meanings of resident/wellness to develop a wellness framework that could guide practice decisions. Upon reflection, our resident wellness framework provided a lens, which through when grounded in relational theory, align and promote culture change values in day-to-day care decisions.

Future and current directions include disseminating of this model at conferences, published research (peer-reviewed, LTC home magazines), consultations with LTC homes and community organisations, as well as current research in the area of staff wellness.

This research reveals that further study is needed in the areas of family member well-being, community member wellness, and intergroup relational wellness as it relates to pushing forward culture change aims in a LTC home context.

Wellness

Conceptualisation of resident wellness as described, experienced, and participatory research.

Relational theory

- Mutuality and relational responsibility
- Mutual empathy
- Authenticity
- Sharing power
- Mutual accommodation
- Relational competence
- Learning through disconnection and connection
- Relational ethics

Processes of culture change are best guided when grounded in relational approach to action, care, and participatory research.

Wellness is self-nurturing and playful care practices that recognize the relational aspects of well-being as a living experience that needs to be valued, expressed, and enacted. Residents describe how culture change values aligned with relational theory, re-approaching practice by focusing on wellness to forward culture change. Within health care, many practices exist for the promotion of health and well-being. Interestingly, an article that examines the integration of wellness approaches in allied health policy and practice reports that current approaches are misaligned with the medical approaches adopted by most institutions today (Brown et al., 2016). Understanding wellness from residents' perspectives is important, not only for shedding light on what is needed to support resident wellness, but also for providing insight into how wellness of entire LTC homes can be enhanced in relational ways that align with culture change principles. In 2015, Dupuis and colleagues described how culture change values aligned with relational theory, re-approaching practice by focusing on wellness to forward culture change aims in social policy and practice has the potential to create well LTC homes where: (1) individual needs for wellness are recognized and met; (2) well individuals fortify authentic, strong relationships ensuring each person is meaningfully regarded and valued; and (3) well relationships foster a culture of care that embodies community.

Relational Wellness

- Self A Well Being
- Reflecting & Sharing Sense of Self
- Positive Evaluations of Self
- Time for Self
- Time for Care
- Be Open
- Be Showing Interest
- Opportunities for Access
- Having Selection & Variety
- Being Well
- Personal Care
- Leisure & Celebration
- Rest

The residents’ well-being model highlights the essential components of well-being in LTC homes.

Examples

- The needs and voices of all, including individuals who require more support who are less verbal must be considered and met in creative ways.
- Consider ways to meet personal space preferences.
- Find ways to create more pleasurable dining experiences.
- Reconsider the need to move residents when health status changes.
- Ensure adequate staffing.
- Enable access to the outdoors.

Implications & Future Directions

Using understandings of resident wellness to scaffold practice decisions is a way to begin to make small changes towards each personal recognising themselves as a "well" individual, realising strengthened relationships, and creating/enhancing communities of care through culture change. Each person engaged and supported by well, relationships should be able to feel that they can contribute to making living better in their LTC home community, in what ever way is meaningful. Future and current directions include dissemination of this model at conferences, published research (peer-reviewed, LTC home magazines), consultations with LTC homes and community organisations, as well as current research in the area of staff wellness.

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