

Making a Difference with Best Practice Guidelines

Best practice guidelines (BPGs) are systematically developed statements of recommended best practice in a specific clinical area. They are designed to enable evidence-based practice, evidence-based management and evidence-based decision-making. They are implemented for the purpose of delivering effective evidence-based care, resolving problems in the clinical setting, achieving excellence in care delivery by meeting or exceeding quality assurance standards and introducing innovation. Research has shown that implementing BPGs can improve processes, resident outcomes and service delivery.

In 2005, the long term care best practice coordinator role was introduced into the long term care sector as a three-year pilot initiative funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) through the Nursing Secretariat. At the completion of the pilot phase in March 2008, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) assumed the management of the initiative with funding from the MOHLTC's Performance Improvement and Compliance Branch.

The goal of the Long Term Care Best Practices Initiative is to support long term care homes in adopting evidence-based practices that will support systematic and consistent approaches to providing quality care for residents. The expected benefits of this project include improved quality of care and resident outcomes in long term care homes, support for nurses and staff in the organizations and improved quality of life for staff. This initiative offers opportunities for long term care homes to become

involved in guideline implementation and to find ways to reach a new level of excellence in resident care.

The Long Term Care Best Practices Initiative has not only resulted in excitement but also hope in a sector that has been systematically marginalized from the current evidence-based practice movement due to lack of financial resources, an inability to support research and the general absence of research and education resources. With a lean team of eight registered nurses working in the capacity of long term care best practice coordinators, one project manager and one administrative support person, the efforts of this team have demonstrated phenomenal results.

And the survey says...

In 2008, a provincial survey of the long term care sector was undertaken by the long term care best practice coordinators to assess the current status of use of best practices in long term care and to direct the focus of the work of the Long Term Care Best Practices Initiative team. The survey was conducted over a one-month period via an online form and was also available through an interview format by phone and in person. Of the 619 long term care homes in Ontario, 236 participated in the survey to give a response rate of 38 per cent. There was a fairly representative division of homes from the non-profit, for profit, charitable and municipal sectors.

The vast majority of respondents (73.3 per cent) reported past experience with implementing BPGs, with most focused on falls, continence and pressure ulcers. These homes overcame the challenges to implementation by using strategies such as incorporating BPGs into their policies and procedures, developing learning packages and providing education to staff, consulting with the long term care best practice coordinator and establishing committees or working groups. These long term care homes also reported using strategies such as quality monitoring, revision of

policies and providing education, educational materials, equipment and supplies to sustain guideline use.

These homes reported benefits in relation to the impact of using BPGs on accreditation, compliance status, resident satisfaction and resident outcomes. Specific outcomes cited by these homes as indicators of the positive impact of BPG implementation ranged from increased staff knowledge to increased resident satisfaction and improvements in specific resident outcomes.

Long term care homes that implemented BPGs also tended to use a variety of resources, including the long term care best practice coordinators, and were able to leverage a number of projects and programs in order to achieve excellence. The key factors identified that support BPG implementation included leadership support, education sessions, support from interdisciplinary staff, residents and their families, adequate financial and staffing resources and having RNAO 'best practice champion' staff. RNAO best practice champions are nurses and others who are passionate about improving nursing practice and resident care in their organization. Anyone who has organizational and/or unit or program level influence can be a champion. Champions can take many different roles. They can bring awareness of BPGs to their organization, influence groups and committees to consider BPGs and mobilize, coordinate and facilitate the training and development of professional staff in BPG implementation.

It is remarkable that the majority of long term care homes already engaged in implementing BPGs reported interest in expanding their implementation activities, and that 83 per cent of those who had not yet implemented a BPG indicated interest in doing so. The high percentage of long term care homes that were actively engaged in or expressing an interest in BPG implementation indicates that a positive culture shift is happening in long term care homes and that evidence-based practice is spreading.

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by Josephine Santos

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Tips for implementing best practice guidelines

For long term care homes that are considering implementing BPGs, here are some tips for success:

- Liaise with the long term care best practice coordinator to get started with the implementation plan.
- Select a dedicated person (e.g., clinical resource nurse, best practice champion nurse) who will provide leadership and support for the implementation of the guidelines.
- Find champions who can support and lead change.
- Identify the key resource people in your long term care home.
- Establish a working group comprised of key stakeholders and team members who are committed to leading the implementation initiative.
- Keep a work plan to track activities, responsibilities and timelines.
- Foster a culture of learning through team work, collaborative assessment and treatment planning.
- Access additional resources and services available in your community, including the psychogeriatric resource consultant, crisis team, geriatric mental health outreach team, Alzheimer Society, Seniors Health Research Transfer Network and so on.
- Link with other long term care homes in your area that are implementing the same guidelines.
- Consider joining a 'community of practice' to support networking and learning from others.
- Identify staff to join the RNAO Best Practice Champions Network and RNAO summer institutes (best practice guidelines and healthy work environment).
- Monitor and evaluate the progress of implementation.
- Celebrate your successes!

It is also significant to note that almost all of the long term care homes implementing BPGs (74.6 per cent) and those that had not yet implemented BPGs (83 per cent) indicated that they see the role of the long term care best practice coordinators as invaluable in their homes. One of the homes commented, “This is the most important initiative ever in the long term care sector. It is changing practice and helping us to focus on quality resident care.” Some of the ways identified by homes for the long term care best practice coordinators to assist them included: education, support for implementation and sustainability, evaluation, mentoring staff, knowledge brokering, capacity building, promotion of networking, creation of tools and consultation.

Site visits, champions and a best practices toolkit

Based on the provincial survey feedback and to support the endeavours of long term

care homes in BPG implementation, the long term care best practice coordinators have made site visits to long term care homes, providing individualized consultation and educational services. In addition, there has been much effort invested in building a cadre of best practice champions to assist long term care homes in developing core skills and capabilities in best practice implementation to enhance effectiveness and sustainability. This was achieved by developing the RNAO BPGs champions workshop curriculum specifically for the long term care sector and targeting Registered Nurses, Registered Practical Nurses and Personal Support Workers as participants. This has resulted in the addition of more than 200 champions who are able to enhance quality of care in long term care through evidence-based practices. To date, there are 684 champions in the long term care sector engaged in BPG implementation.

Sequentially, the long term care best practice coordinators have developed a

best practices toolkit, which is designed to assist long term care homes in addressing, implementing and evaluating several key clinical priority areas that were identified through the provincial survey. The key clinical priorities are pain assessment and management, falls prevention and management, resident-centred care, assessment and management of continence and constipation, and risk prevention, assessment and management of pressure ulcers. The best practices toolkit is available at www.ltctoolkit.rnao.ca. The long term care best practice coordinators are also available to provide consultation and training services on how to use these resources. **LTC**

For more information about the Long Term Care Best Practices Initiative, Best Practice Champions Network® and summer institutes, or to contact the long term care best practice coordinator in your region, visit www.rnao.ca or email ltcbpi@rnao.org.