

Caring for Residents with Parkinson's Disease

After reviewing applications from Community Care Access Centres (CCAC), management staff at Extencicare Guildwood became aware that there was a significantly increased number of residents on the waiting list with Parkinson's disease. Clearly there was a need to provide enhanced care for these residents and Extencicare Guildwood staff, with support from their corporate office, embarked on a passionate journey—often focusing on the primary diagnosis (e.g., dementia, cerebrovascular accident, diabetes)—to improve the quality of life for residents living with Parkinson's.

Extencicare's Parkinson's program

The first step was to develop a special Parkinson's Program unique to the facility. After meetings with in-house physicians and the dietitian, pharmacist and physiotherapist and nursing, dietary and housekeeping staff, the decision was made to go forward with this 'must do' project.

Collaboratively, staff set out to establish the Parkinson's Program as one of the facility's annual goals, while realizing that time was needed to research many avenues, including:

- links with the local chapter of the Parkinson's Society;
- education and training available for all staff;
- resources in the community;
- funding to support the program if required; and
- special equipment necessary to provide quality exercise to improve mobility.

In-house education

Extencicare Guildwood linked with members of the Parkinson's Society in Toronto, who began to visit the facility to assist

staff on their journey. In-house educational sessions began soon after, addressing the following topics:



- 1. What is Parkinson's?** An explanation of what occurs in the brain was presented in a way that was understandable to all caregivers.
- 2. How is Parkinson's diagnosed?** The necessity of relying on the expertise of a neurologist was emphasized.
- 3. What is the treatment for Parkinson's?** The types of medications available and their purposes were reviewed.
- 4. What are the common symptoms of the disease?** Tremor, slowness, stiffness, impaired balance and muscle rigidity were discussed.
- 5. What are other possible symptoms?** People with Parkinson's may suffer from fatigue, soft speech, writing problems, constipation, disturbance in sleep habits and stooped posture, and these were also reviewed.
- 6. What can long term care staff do to make life better for residents with Parkinson's?** Successful interventions that were identified included exercise, relaxation, nutrition, recreation, occupational therapy, speech therapy, good medical care, encouragement and praise to individuals for their accomplishments.

7. What about medications? The critical importance of administering medications at precise times, as prescribed by the neurologist and physician, was highlighted.

Extencicare Guildwood's administrator and management team met several times with members of the Parkinson's Society and received exceptional advice regarding outside services that would be required to make the program successful. These included speech pathology, pharmacology expertise regarding Parkinson's medications, occupational therapy, movement disorders, special program education, local neurologists specializing in the disease and other types of therapies.

The Parkinson's Society also assisted the team with ongoing evaluation of its progress in creating a comprehensive Parkinson's Program.

With this groundwork behind them, team members felt they were moving ahead in a well informed, confident and committed manner.

Departmental interventions

Nursing department staff were excited and were starting to see changes in their day to day delivery of care. During many in-services, staff developed a much better understanding of what is happening when residents have tremors or freeze. A registered nurse was assigned to administer Parkinson's medications at the exact time prescribed. Education stressed that there is no window for these medications. After just a short period of time, nursing staff noticed that this practice made an incredible and rewarding difference for both the residents and staff. When medications were delivered at precise intervals, residents were much more able to perform activities of daily living.

Staff in the recreation department took ownership for providing special programs. Staff were sent out for training, and developed and commenced new programs on a regular basis. A speech pathologist was hired. With the guidance

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One success story

A gentleman was admitted to Extencicare Guildwood from his nearby home in a crisis situation. His diagnosis was Parkinson's and he could no longer cope on his own. On admission, he presented as unkempt and fragile. He expressed feelings of worthlessness.

After the team completed its assessments a plan of care was established. Within a couple of months the man's condition improved and stabilized.

Within two years, he was elected president of the Residents' Council. Each week he went out with friends to a local restaurant and he enthusiastically participated in a wide variety of programs.

When the man passed away because of another underlying condition, staff were saddened but took solace in the knowledge that he had lived with quality, dignity and purpose while residing at Extencicare Guildwood.

of the physiotherapist, Extencicare Guildwood purchased new equipment for strengthening muscles and to provide ongoing exercise to maintain mobility. The restorative program was expanded to assist with these objectives.

The dietitian and dietary manager assessed and addressed the needs of individual residents with Parkinson's with respect to nutrition, swallowing issues and bowel elimination. The housekeeping department started paying closer attention to keeping areas free of clutter. The social worker was available for discussion and to offer support to residents and families. And the physicians showed outstanding commitment by following through when any changes in a resident's status were communicated to them.

Once these interventions were implemented, staff and families began to notice that the residents were having better days. The Parkinson's Program was clearly working.

The Parkinson's Society has presented Extencicare Guildwood with a plaque

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recognizing it as a home of excellence. The plaque is proudly displayed in the front foyer. The local community and CCACs are also aware of the home's success.

The sustainability of Extencicare Guildwood's Parkinson's Program rests with the commitment of management staff and the program team to provide continuing education to current and new employees. Ongoing evaluation is critical. Furthermore, staff must keep abreast of new research, incorporating best practices into the program for further enhancement. **LTC**