

Looking Underneath the Activity Calendar

Have you been able to connect in a meaningful way with residents while they are engaged in recreation programs? Really connect?

The recreation therapy (RT) team at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto has attempted to answer this question for the past 10 years through a process of self-reflective practice. This has resulted in an innovative delivery model for RT services. Inspired by the Sunnybrook story, members of the recreation team at Specialty Care decided to dig deeper into their own practice, looking ‘underneath their activity calendar’ to explore the meaningfulness of their RT programs for residents.

The Sunnybrook story

It all started in the early 1990s, when the team at Sunnybrook felt disconnected from what it believed to be resident-focused care and how RT services were being delivered. Reflective inquiry led the group to ask why time-consuming leisure assessment tools were being administered when residents had difficulty understanding the questions, which in any case provided little insight into the resident as a person. The recreation therapists took a closer look at the ways in which programs were planned and how activity calendars were created. RT team members felt they had hit the jackpot if Mrs. Smith’s leisure interests fit nicely with one of the programs being offered on the activity calendar. However, the recreation therapists had no idea what to do if Mrs. Smith shared information about a leisure activity that was

meaningful to her but was not offered on the calendar.

After an in-depth exploration with academic partners at the University of Waterloo, Sunnybrook retired the use of standardized assessment tools and implemented the personal leisure profile (PLP). The PLP takes the form of an introductory conversation related to the resident’s leisure activities. These guiding questions have provided great insight into what matters most to residents and continue to serve as the basis for planning RT services.

Recreational therapists are asked to ensure that the resident understands why the PLP questions are being asked. They are encouraged to discover as much as they can about the resident by speaking with family, reviewing the resident’s chart and discussing ideas with the interdisciplinary care team. The recreational therapist’s role is to help determine what the resident’s leisure pursuits will be, based on what has been discovered.

The development of the PLP was the beginning of a journey to bring meaning to the lives of Sunnybrook’s residents. After further exploration and consultation with the people in their care, leisure quality indicators (QIs) were created in 2005.

The QIs are an index of experiences enjoyed by residents while they are engaged in leisure activities (described below). The QIs now serve as the foundation for RT service planning for residents.

Enjoyment

- A vital component of the leisure experience.
- Enjoyment is enhanced by the ability to choose meaningful activities, which is often associated with a sense of escape.
- It is also increased through fun and laughter in RT participation.

Being yourself

- A sense of identity can be enhanced through participation in RT.
- Opportunities for self-affirmation are enabled through choice of participation.
- Opportunity is given for residents to engage in roles previously experienced in life. For example, residents who have enjoyed gardening in the past may partic-

Personal Leisure Profile

1. What do you enjoy?

(Addresses past/present leisure interests.)

2. What is it about that activity that you enjoy?

(Addresses characteristics of leisure pursuits.)

3. Recently, what has brought enjoyment/happiness to your day?

(Addresses current leisure status.)

4. What is stopping you from enjoying that activity?

(Addresses barriers to leisure involvement.)

5. Is there something that you have always wanted to do?

(Addresses hopes and dreams.)

ipate in maintaining the home’s garden spaces, thereby enabling them to be themselves by participating in an activity that has held meaning in the past.

- New meaning in life is created through the discovery of new leisure interests.

Developing yourself

- New skills and knowledge can assist in maintaining quality of life.
- ‘Leisure becoming’ promotes re-creation in the individual’s life.
- RT can promote a sense of achievement.

Meeting others

- This can range from friendship to companionship to general socializing.
- The social aspect of RT seems to be a clear motivating factor for participation.
- Reminiscing with others is encouraged in social programs.
- RT may simply be associated with being in the presence of others.

Feeling like you belong

- This area can be divided into physical,

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- social and community realms.
- It is associated with the existence of meaningful relationships.
- It is enhanced by the connections people have with the resources available in the community.
- Being invited to a recreation program fosters a sense of belonging.

Helping others

- There are opportunities for small informal gestures to more formal volunteer activities.
- This leads to a sense of purpose and of having a role to fill.
- It gives an opportunity to contribute to the well-being of the community as a whole.
- Residents can use personal skills and knowledge to feel useful.

Quality indicators and RT practice

Figure 1 shows a conceptual QI framework that describes the process in which RT services can be considered, blending the philoso-

phy of resident-focused care with self-reflective practice.

Making recreation meaningful at Specialty Care

In traditional models of RT service delivery, the primary focus is resident participation. At first glance, the activity calendars at Specialty Care show similar offerings to those of many long term care homes. The difference is that services have expanded to offer opportunities that residents have told staff hold meaning for them. For example, the need for residents to develop themselves is achieved through the 'lifelong journey series,' which includes language lessons, a speakers' series and poetry readings. The 'veterans grant a wish' program has addressed the need for residents to feel like they belong and demonstrates that they are living in a home where hopes and dreams can come true.

In addition, documentation practices have deliberately moved away from an ac-

tivity-focused philosophy and toward an experienced-based one that is reflective of the QIs. In the past, a resident note might have read: "Mr. Smith has participated in the lunch group program for 60 minutes, once a week, for a period of six months." Now the resident note reflects the meaning of the program for the resident. For example, "Mr. Smith stated, 'I love being a member of this group, it reminds me of the weekly dinners I had with my family at home.' Based on this statement, Mr. Smith seems to feel that he belongs in his weekly lunch group."

Evaluation practices are also being created that ask residents to reflect on the programs in which they are engaging, the QIs that are being met by that program and the meaningfulness of that program in their lives.

The Specialty Care story

When Specialty Care discovered Sunnybrook's paradigm shift from activity-based



A conceptual quality indicator (QI) framework.

leisure to experienced-based leisure it was viewed as an opportunity to celebrate components of RT services that were congruent with this thinking, as well as to improve areas of inconsistency. For example, the company's service delivery model entitled 'enabling choices' includes a component called 'meaningful activity.' This includes meaningful leisure, instrumental activities and restorative care. Instrumental activities include a resident ambassador program, which celebrates the residents' willingness to help others and nurtures their sense of belonging in the home.

The resident ambassador program also identifies the resident as a person affiliated to a good cause while he or she is engaged in 'helping activities' such as assisting in the dining room, escorting or visiting residents, folding laundry and other meaningful instrumental tasks. Resident ambassadors

wear a nametag and are easily identified, which provides the opportunity for staff, residents and families to thank them for their contribution.

One other way that Specialty Care has achieved experienced-based leisure is by directly involving the residents in the planning of their activity calendar. This has provided RT team members with the opportunity to understand what meaningful activities have been offered previously and to have residents share their hopes for leisure experiences in the coming months.

There are also areas of opportunity for Specialty Care in using the experienced-based leisure model. These include revising leisure assessments, documentation and evaluation. Specialty Care is excited to consider the practice initiatives that the Sunnybrook therapists have implemented. The team is currently working toward a renewal of the

RT assessment process and the integration of QIs as a way to plan activities, describe resident experiences, evaluate activities and enhance reporting at care team meetings.

Creating life experiences

This RT service delivery model provides support for the shifting of services from activity-based programming to experience-based programming. At Specialty Care, staff believe that meaningful participation in recreation programs can extend beyond the leisure experience, with the potential to create greater meaning for the lives of residents in long term care.

Looking 'underneath the activity calendar' gives staff the opportunity to discover new ways to enhance the meaning of RT programs in their long term care homes and make leisure activities more enjoyable and meaningful for the residents in their care. **LTC**



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