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November 2006

Study Reveals Roadblocks and Strategies for Quality End of Life Care in Long Term Care Homes

A study recently published in the Journal of Palliative Care (22:1/2006), examined the perceptions and practices regarding end-of-life (EOL) care in long term care homes across Ontario. The study set out to understand EOL practices based on the current available evidence.

The study, entitled “*Quality of Care for Residents Dying in Ontario Long-Term Care Facilities: Findings From a Survey of Directors of Care*”, was conducted through a cross-sectional survey sent to all licensed long term care homes in Ontario. Homes were invited to submit a survey response reflecting their opinion about the quality of EOL provided to dying residents in their homes, in the context of 4 key areas of service delivery: organizational structure; staffing; communication; and education. The survey garnered 426 responses, representing a 76% response rate which is exceptionally high by research standards.

Directors of care were asked to assess a series of strategies that could contribute to improving the quality of care of dying residents. The most highly rated strategies directors of care felt they should focus on included the following:

- ▶ Continued development and periodic review of policies and procedures related to pain management
- ▶ Development of advanced care plans incorporating residents’ wishes
- ▶ Setting formal objectives for quality care for dying residents

In addition, the study attempted to identify factors associated with the provision of high quality care to dying LTC residents. Key factors thought to be beneficial to EOL care included:

- ▶ Consensus in the facility about what constitutes quality end-of-life care
- ▶ Availability of sufficient pain management expertise
- ▶ Staff confidence to discuss issues of death and dying with families

Other highlights from the survey include the need for:

- ▶ Development of further strategies to orient and educate staff about death and dying
- ▶ More education for staff regarding dying residents’ preferences in the context of culturally sensitive care
- ▶ Better communication between physicians, family members and staff

It is expected that these study results will aid decision makers in developing practical strategies for improving the quality of care for the dying resident in long term care.

Available research on EOL in Ontario long term care homes is limited. Although this large scale study has made a significant contribution to EOL care for LTC residents, further large-scale studies are needed.

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