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March 2007

Research Program Identifies Factors Important in Easing Transitions in Long-Term Care

The Murray Alzheimer Research and Education Project (MAREP) at the University of Waterloo has been conducting an on-going research program focused on gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of various transitions within long-term care for families and their relatives. The transition process involved in moving a family member from a community setting (e.g., home, hospital) to a long-term care home can be very stressful for family partners in care. Family members experience a tremendous amount of turmoil, uncertainty and guilt and in some cases, a sense of relief, when they move their relative to a long-term care home. Once moved to a long-term care setting, residents and families can experience a number of placement transitions (e.g., from one home to another or from one unit to another) over time in order to better accommodate the changing care needs of those residents. We wanted to examine how these different transitions were experienced by families in order to identify factors that might help ease the process for both residents and their families.

More specifically, using in-depth interviews with family members directly involved in transitions, we have examined the move from:

1. Community care (e.g., home, hospital) to a long-term care home
2. From one care unit to another within a continuum of care home (a facility that meets a range of care needs across the continuum of care from retirement living to complex continuing care)
3. One home to another home.

The ultimate goal of this research program is to identify specific ways in which community agencies and long-term care settings might help ease these transitions for families.

Integrating our own research with existing research on the long-term care transitions, we developed a comprehensive model of the primary and interconnected factors that work together to shape the overall experience of the move for families and, which together, either serve to impede or facilitate a positive transition for families.

A number of principles and recommendations for easing the transition process came out of these studies, including:

- Prepare families and residents adequately for the move
- Be aware of the experience for family members and new residents by understanding the range of emotions felt during transitions, being sensitive to the needs of both families and residents during the process, and providing support for families and new residents before, during and after the transition.
- Try to limit the number of unnecessary moves in order to decrease stress on the resident and family

- Help families feel more in control of the process by acknowledging and respecting the expertise and knowledge that family members have of their relatives, including them and new residents in decision-making throughout the process, and allowing for flexibility in the process.
- Ensure the actual move is as easy and welcoming as possible by being available to greet the new resident when he or she arrives and offering support and help during the actual move.
- Get to know the resident and family. This demonstrates a commitment to person-centred and/or family models of care early on by gaining knowledge of the new resident (background, interests, preferences, routines, etc.) and her or his family members (preferred role in relative's care, expectations of facility, concerns, needs) throughout the transition process.
- Enhance communication between families and staff
- Help family members and residents build their social resource base by making families aware of the supports and services available to them in the community and in the long-term care home, fostering strong and respectful resident-staff and family-staff relationships, helping residents to develop new friendships in the home, and linking new family partners in care with others who have been through the process.
- Strive for the highest quality of care
- Maintain continuity in the resident's life

A full list of the recommendations can be found on the MAREP website at www.marep.uwaterloo.ca under "Research" and "Family Transition Study".

We are continuing our work on transitions with a recent project being conducted by a post-doctoral fellow working with MAREP, Tamara Sussman, Ph.D. This specific study is examining the experience of transitions from the perspectives of all those involved throughout the transition process, including residents, family members, staff in community and long-term care homes, and policy makers. By including the formal care partners and policy makers it is hoped that recommendations regarding best practices around transitions will be able to take into consideration important administrative and policy contexts.

Watch for an update on this research project on News and Views and for more information about the transitions project or MAREP, contact Sherry Dupuis, Ph.D., Director of MAREP at Tel. 519-888-4567, ext. 36188 or sldupuis@uwaterloo.ca

To purchase a copy of the study published in the Journal of Gerontological Social Work, Volume 46, Issue 1 - Understanding the Experience of Moving a Loved One to a Long-Term Care Facility: Family Members' Perspectives, go to <https://www.haworthpress.com/store/ArticleAbstract.asp?sid=UQVGE6TG8A2B9HHAA03K5V7063A99R11&ID=61743> If you are having difficulty obtaining a copy of this study please contact Krista Robinson-Holt, Director of Health Planning and Research at OLTCA.