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Resident and family quality of life indicators in long term care

The following is a summary of a research study on family and resident driven quality indicators for quality of life outcome measures. The study was conducted in Quebec and published in the "Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy" (October 2006) explores indicators that are identified by residents that define quality of life from the residents' perspective. Researchers, from Université Laval Québec, studied current literature and interviewed families and residents in long term care homes to determine what the most meaningful aspects of a quality of life would be for a resident of a long term care home. The study provides excellent methods for collaboration with homes, families and residents.

There are very few studies that have integrated the opinions of long term care home residents and their families into the process of developing valid outcome measures for quality of life in long term care homes. Outcome measures are indicators that are put into place and monitored over time to assist long term care homes in evaluating their programs and services from a quality of life perspective. Researchers often decide on a range of specific quality of life indicators that reflect concepts such as verbal communication, well-being, participation level in social activities, and engagement and integration into the community. However, the risk of having researchers select indicators is that they may overlook quality of life issues that residents value, but have never had a chance to raise. Qualitative studies, which rely on observing or interviewing, are one way to ensure residents have input into what defines quality of life from their perspective, rather than the researchers perspective. This information can then be used to create more meaningful indicators.

The objective of this study was to identify the interpersonal and environmental characteristics of long term care homes that best support residents and their families, in terms of achieving quality of life. An interview approach was used with elderly residents (some with dementia) and families from five long term care homes. The first part of the interview contained questions on life experiences and daily activities. The second part included general and specific open ended questions to determine what the most important characteristics of a long term care home might be, that would contribute to quality of life. Examples included "What makes you feel at home?", and, "What would be the ideal long term care home?"

Analysis showed that of the quality of life characteristics identified by the participants, the three most important ones were:

- ▶ Feeling that one's identity is respected by caregivers
- ▶ A sense of belonging - being accepted and aligned with caregivers and other residents
- ▶ Feeling that caregivers, through their gestures, attitudes and methods of work, are competent

Other quality of life factors noted as important by participants included:

- ▶ Access to a private room with additional facility space
- ▶ Feeling a sense of compassion and affective support from staff
- ▶ Maintaining a role within the community
- ▶ Sharing good times, laughing, playing and joking with peers
- ▶ Preserving a sense of control
- ▶ Reduced perception of the impact of government funding restrictions on life in the long term care home
- ▶ Staff stability
- ▶ Having access to hobbies, leisure and spiritual resources

Long term care homes with care and service delivery that support the characteristics identified by residents and families, like the ones listed above, can continue to ensure quality of life and help the aging resident share in opportunities to reach their full potential. Using this method provides an opportunity to collaborate with the homes' care team to ensure residents are provided with a quality environment that's important to them.

Robichaud, L., Durand, P.J., Bédard, R. & Ouellet, J. (2006) Quality of life indicators in long term care: Opinions of elderly residents and their families. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 73(4), 245-251

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