

September, 2021

Family Council
Network 4
Advocacy
Committee

Newsletter



Committed to improving the lives of Ontario Residents in Long Term Care

Ongoing Staffing Challenges in LTCs!

By Carol Dueck

Are retention and recruitment issues on the agenda at your Family Council meetings?

Family Councils, care givers and residents in most Ontario long term care (LTC) homes are struggling with concerns of persistent and growing staffing issues. This is a problem that pre-dates the COVID 19 pandemic. Chronic staffing challenges are a leading cause of worker burn-out, substandard care for residents and increased infection rates of not only COVID 19 but other communicable diseases. It is difficult to get an accurate count on staffing levels in the region, but most Niagara and Hamilton LTCs are in active and constant hiring. This means a disproportionate amount of administration time is spent on recruitment and intake training. New staff are often only hired part-time and are forced to work more than one job to make ends meet. This leads to confusion over protocols, less time to build meaningful connections with residents and exhaustion.



It is not just an Ontario problem. Coast to coast, unions, staff, residents and family members are sounding the alarm bells regarding staff retention and recruitment – but who is listening?

In Ontario, on August 6, 2021, CUPE Ottawa area health care workers kicked off the first rally - 25 rallies are expected over the next two months. They are demanding the government revoke COVID-19 emergency orders that the union says can indefinitely override their workplace rights and protections.

In 2020, as LTC homes began coping with the increased COVID 19 infection rates and new protocols, the federal and provincial governments provided emergency funding for increased staffing for care and screening as well as for infection control equipment and supplies. In the fall of 2020, all Ontario provincial parties supported the “Time to Care Act” that recognized a minimum of 4.1 hours of resident care per day in an LTC. Unfortunately, this new minimum standard will not be mandatory until 2024-25! The prolonged period to provide sustainable funding forces administrators into a corner. Staffing shortages or over budget?

It appears that the Provincial government is willing to wait until there are enough nurses and newly trained PSWs to fill vacancies before providing the sustained funding. Nurses and PSWs know how difficult it is in the work environment and are not willing to continue this workload for four more years. It is not surprising that recruitment is difficult and enhanced education opportunities are not completely full. There is no job security or manageable workloads without sustainable funding solidly on the table.

What can you and your Family Council do?

In publically funded LTCs, administrators need budget support to build a sustainable recruitment and retention plan. With the federal election ongoing and a provincial election set for June 2022, now is the time for family councils to target elected officials and candidates on making predictable and sustained funding for LTCs part of their platforms, commitments and operational strategies. The squeaky wheel gets the grease, and thus directly engaging your local officials in debates, letter writing and emails put this issue on their agenda.

Actions for Family Councils to consider:

- **Be Heard and Be Seen** - The Ontario Health Coalition is organizing a province-wide rally - on **October 4th** - the day the Ontario legislature returns. Events will be held at Queen's Park in Toronto, Ottawa, Thunder Bay, Durham, Sudbury, Chatham, Woodstock, Kingston in HAMILTON at **noon** at Gore Park, Corner of King and James St., an NIAGARA at **noon** at MPP Sam Oosterhoff's Office, King St and Wagner Lane, Beamsville For more information: <https://www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca/index.php/event-lets-make-it-huge-queens-park-sept-13-12-pm-rise-up-for-ltc/>

- **Collaborate with other networks and unions to make our voices louder:** For example, FCN4 is working with the Champlain Family Council Network (Ottawa) and the North network to voice our common concerns and present a consensus as to what families expect the government to do. We are also asking for a joint meeting with Ron Phillips, Ontario Minister of Long-Term Care to work in a positive proactive approach between families, residents, LTCs and the Government of Ontario.

- **Write your MPP:** The FCN4 Advocacy Committee continues to write not only to Minister Philipps but all of the Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) in the region expressing our concerns and demand for action on the Time to Care Act and staffing issues. Be specific in your requests – advocate for transformation, full-family access to residents, funding equipment and increased full-time staff. Let them know that small incremental tweaks are not sufficient and our loved ones deserve dignity and proper care.

- **Engage your MPP:** Invite them to your family council meetings, ask for a meeting at their office to build a relationship and share your personal stories and ideas. Use these opportunities to hear their positions and challenge unfair assumptions of life for a resident or family caregivers.

- **Keep the debate public:** speak with your local or community media outlets – radio, TV and newspaper to keep the issues of LTCs in the public space. Media love personal stories so share your experiences to help put a human connection on a huge problem in LTCs. Use your own family council or personal social media pages (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) to share your concerns and ideas with your community.

- **Support the staff:** Offer your support to the Administration at your LTC and ask how you can effectively advocate on their behalf. Ask for a meeting to understand the specific staffing needs and help provide interim solutions unique to your LTC.

Let the LTC staff know you appreciate the support they provide your loved one under difficult circumstances. Let me know you are advocating for better employment conditions. Little things like cookies, coffee cards or a kind word can go a long way on a hard day!

- **Share your ideas** and successful engagements with our network - you may have that unique intervention that others can use.

Sharing Success Stories

Connecting with loved ones through technology: The Ontario Health Central recently shared a research project to improve communication with residents during outbreaks. To combat deterioration in depression and mobility, this sector partnered with a few providers, including Google and the Geek Squad to enhance technology in LTC homes. By connecting Google Hub Max Devices to the homes' WiFi, they demonstrated that even for those with substantial limitations, sight, mobility and dementia there was increased participation, mobilization and independence, less depression, and, importantly, few complaints from staff that it would impact on their time for care.

The key is voice activated devices. Most residents could practice and then initiate music they liked, turn on TV or radio, and make/receive phone calls. The screen offers a view called "Teams" that the resident can

chose the people they want to see. It is almost like they are all visiting in the room with the resident. One family found that they were able to encourage their Mom to use the remote to adjust the electric easy chair for a better view of the computer screen. This technology offers support and a level of independence for the resident.

Turning Data into Funding Allocations

For a Long-Term Care facility to operate well, the Home requires funding from the Provincial Government, and the Government in turn needs evidence to make funding decisions. I am the Resident Assessment Information (RAI) and Mini Data System (MDS) Coordinator at one home, and it is my job to demonstrate that our residents require a lot of care and nursing time. As I code every need that is required for the resident, the computer places the resident into a certain Resident Utilization Group (RUG group) and assigns a Case Mix Index (CMI) number as to why the resident is in that certain RUG group. The number can be very low which means the resident requires little help to a very high number, indicating the resident requires a lot of nursing time and effort. There are 16 categories: all needing a code and explanations. This work is very technical and critical that information is evidence based, as it impacts provincial funding.

I work very closely with residents, personal support workers and nursing staff to help with proper and precise documentation. Working together helps turn their experiences into data that I can use, which can inform new funding allocations. I am happy to report that this collaboration has improved our documentation and funding!

(Submitted by Wendy Schrama RN RAI Coordinator)

Depression rates dropping

At the start of the COVID 19 pandemic, the Ontario Government locked-down LTCs and prevented loved ones and caregivers from visiting residents. This led to severe isolation and depression amongst residents and despite best efforts, LTC staff cannot replace the value of a loved ones' visit. We heard these stories in the media and from caregivers.

My roll as a data specialist is to use the Mini Data System (MDS) to document the mood of residents using 17 specialized questions. This helps us systematically track the 'depression rating system' (DRS) in a particular LTC. These numbers were staggering high over the early months and multiple waves and lockdowns of the pandemic. Now that essential care givers and families who are fully vaccinated and with a negative COVID 19 test can enter the LTCs, we are pleased to see the DRS and depressive symptoms reducing. May we never have such a severe lock down again, for it may not be COVID 19 that will kill our residents, but isolation will.

(Submitted by Wendy Schrama RN RAI Coordinator)

The HNHB BSO Long Term Care team is Championing Change!

In March 2020, the BSO (Behavioural Supports Ontario) Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant (HNHB) Long Term care team embarked on a journey to champion change in its efforts to promote person-and-family-centered care. This team has been approved to start its pre-designation process and collaborate with the Registered Nurses Association Ontario (RNAO) to become a Best Practice Spotlight Organization. "This designation is an opportunity for health service and academic organizations to formally partner with RNAO over a three-year period. The goal is to create evidence-based practice cultures through systematic implementation and evaluation of multiple RNAO clinical Best Practice Guidelines".



The BSO HHNB Long Term Care team is the first program of its kind to begin the journey for this designation. This team effort started with forming a working group (including multi-disciplinary professionals and family representation) to identify gaps in service delivery related to person-and-family centered care in partnering HHNB Long Term Care Homes. The team identified the key priorities in regards to increasing the involvement of residents and their families, loved ones and caregivers in all aspects of their care. Inspired by the team's passion to champion change, at a staff meeting in December 2019, everyone was asked to write the word that best describes his/ her answer to the question: "How will I champion change?" Their words were used to form the teams' collective identity, branding and missions statement. Together, we can be agents of change!

Important! Mark Your Calendars.

Advance notice for the next Family Council Network Four Regional Meeting:

FCN-4 Zoom Meeting

Date: Wednesday, October 20, 2021

Time: 1:15 - 3:30 p.m.

Speaker: **Samantha Peck** (Executive Director of Family Councils Ontario)

Contact: Chair FCN4 Advocacy Committee at AdvocacyFCN4@ProtonMail.com

Books For Sale

We have access to several books written by local writers that deal with issues related to Long Term Care, aging and seniors issues; caregiver topics; and healthy living. Check the website for details on the following titles:

A Slice of Life (\$15); ***Voices of the City*** (\$12); ***Older Caregivers*** (\$12); ***Staying Healthy*** (\$10). Proceeds from the sale of these books are used to support the work of the FCN4 Advocacy Committee. To purchase any of these books, e-mail: Tom Carrothers at carphaltonchapter@gmail.com.

FCN-4 Advocacy Committee Website

<https://www.network4longtermcareadvocacy.com/>

Have you checked our website lately? It's a good way to read about the latest happenings in the Long Term Care both in Ontario and federally. Also, the notes from our latest Regional FCN4 Zoom meeting held on June 8th are posted as well as other recent activities by our committee. If you did not get our April newsletter on the Ontario Ombudsman, go to our website and read it there. Check the website for everything you need to know about dealing with COVID in LTC and where to get help if you need it as well as numerous links to the latest articles on a host of issues related to Long Term Care. Want to run a Family Council Zoom meeting? The instructions can be downloaded by clicking on the icon on the Home Page.

Also, keep up with the latest by following us on our Facebook Page: [Family Council Network 4](#)

Newsletter Committee :	Editor: Carly Volkes	Design: Peter Gnish	Proofing: Members of FCN4 Committee
Contact: Carol Dueck	Chair FCN4 Advocacy Committee at AdvocacyFCN4@ProtonMail.com		