

Personal Support Worker Empowerment in LTC



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Background

- Environmental Scan in 2009 showed the following about PSW empowerment
 - Do not feel they can influence change as they often do not have opportunity to be involved in the process
 - Limited training related to palliative care
 - Role not clearly defined in providing palliative care
 - Very resident-focused
 - Strong sense of team amongst PSWs
 - Lack of organizational grief and loss support

Why Empower Personal Support Workers?

- The palliative care “team” is different in LTC: PSWs provide the majority of the bedside care to residents at the end-of-life
- Their empowerment is crucial to the development and sustainability of a palliative care culture
- Their role on the interprofessional team has not been clearly defined.

Defining PSW competencies as an empowerment strategy

- Understanding the role and scope of practice is crucial for interprofessional communication, and inclusion in decision-making.
 - what is the PSW qualified to do?
 - how is the PSW role distinct from other professional roles? What are the areas of possible overlap with the roles of others?

The benefits of having competencies

- To describe the scope of practice; the major areas of responsibility; the ‘tasks’ that make up the work: What should a PSW be able to do and know in order to work in palliative LTC ?
- To describe the standard of care all palliative residents of LTC can expect to receive
- To provide a framework for ongoing professional development and to guide curriculum development
- To acknowledge and promote palliative care as a specialty for PSWs
- To provide a framework for evaluating practice, write job descriptions, guide hiring

Summary of Competencies

1. Care of the resident
2. Care of the family
3. Care at the end of life
4. Communication
5. Time Management
6. Team work
7. Self-care
8. Professional Development
9. Ethical and Legal Issues
10. Advocacy

PSW Empowerment

- PSW leads
- PSW Membership on the PC team
- PSW meeting with LTC home Management

PSWs discover the power of “sticking together”

- having a PSW network, regular meetings
 - sense of “professional identity”; sense of pride as “the frontline”; greater job satisfaction
- sense of voice in day to day planning and decision-making
- trust in their own knowledge and instincts; confidence in scope of practice = better interprofessional communication = better resident care
- more confidence engaging with outside partners (volunteers, for example)

Risks

- rebalancing of power in the institutional hierarchy both exciting and risky
- fear of “over-stepping”

Key Messages

- PSW empowerment is the key to creating a sustainable culture of palliative care in LTC
- Understanding the complexity of the PSW role and scope of practice in LTC is crucial
- Educational opportunities are the key to PSW empowerment

Further Information

Visit our website

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