

## RESEARCH ON THE RUN

Integrated Care

# The potential for Personal Support Workers to bring stroke best practices to stroke survivors and their family caregivers in their homes: An exploratory study

The project was conducted to investigate the potential of Personal Support Workers to be more active supporters of stroke survivors and their family caregivers.

## Key Learnings

The PSW role continues to grow as the population ages and with person-centred care and de-institutionalization initiatives. Research is needed to guide the more active and explicit inclusion of PSWs in interdisciplinary healthcare teams.

PSWs contribute to the rehabilitation and community reintegration of stroke survivors, but their efforts are not recognized by other healthcare providers.

There is potential for PSWs to provide more support to stroke survivors and their families, and the opportunity to develop and implement a new model of care for stroke rehabilitation in the community.

## Project overview

Stroke is a leading cause of adult disability and the third leading cause of death in Canada, with more than 50,000 Canadians experiencing a stroke each year. In Ontario, Personal Support Workers (PSWs) provide the majority of care in the home care sector and long term care facilities, yet little is known about their role in the provision of evidence-based stroke care. Further, there is little direction to guide their active participation as key members of interdisciplinary care teams.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of PSWs in evidence-based stroke rehabilitation and community reintegration in Ontario home care according to 2010 Canadian Stroke Strategy Best Practice Recommendations (CSS-BPRs).

## What did the researchers do?

A concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design was used to investigate the role of PSWs in evidence-based stroke rehabilitation and community reintegration. Chart audits (n=234), surveys (n=270), interviews (n=28), focus groups (n=7) and an Advisory Committee (n=14) informed the development of a new framework for integrating PSWs into interdisciplinary healthcare team

## What did the researchers find?

A substantive, descriptive framework for describing an enhanced role for PSWs in evidence-based stroke care and community re-integration as key members of interdisciplinary care teams emerged. It includes four key activities to guide PSW interactions with other health care team members that will trigger, support the implementation and/or maintenance of CSS-BPRs:

- *Observe*: A PSW pays careful attention and makes inquiries to notice, learn or perceive significant issues about the client's care.
- *Coach*: A PSW encourages or explains and demonstrates to the client and caregiver how to carry out an activity for the client's care.
- *Assist*: A PSW provides support to a client and caregiver to complete a care-related task through physical help or verbal cueing.
- *Report*: A PSW provides spoken or written accounts to other members of the client's healthcare team of an important observation, action, or change regarding the client's care.

Three themes emerged indicating challenges and opportunities for applying the OCAR framework in current home and community care:

- Since PSWs are unregulated healthcare providers, their scope of practice and accountability is difficult to define, which may in part be due to the lack of standardization in PSW education.
- There is a limited understanding and awareness of the overall PSW role in providing care to clients and their families at home and in the community.
- Health system policies, procedures and processes often impede the two-way sharing of information among team members.

## IMPACT: How are we moving Knowledge to Action?

We are identifying opportunities for testing the application of the OCAR framework as a tool for integrating interdisciplinary teams in various home health care contexts.

### What was SE's role in this research?

The Saint Elizabeth Research Centre led this project with the assistance of an interprofessional project team of front-line staff. PSWs and personal support supervisors from the SE Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Service Delivery Centre were also research study participants and a past client and their family caregiver participated as members of the study advisory committee

### Who were the researchers?

Paul Holyoke, PhD, Director, SE Research Centre  
 Wendy Gifford, PhD  
 Justine Giosa, Manager, Research Operations, SERC  
 Danielle Bender  
 Sandra Tudge

#### Frontline Staff Research Team Members:

Bonnie Jean Stegemann, Personal Support Worker,  
 Vivienne Epstein, Speech-Language Pathologist

#### Other Healthcare Providers

Melissa Aldoroty, Occupational Therapist  
 Judy Provencher, Physiotherapist

#### External Researchers

Jody Hales, Director, Operational Support,  
 Canadian Red Cross National Health

### How was this project funded?

This research was funded by The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and administered by the Ontario Stroke Network (OSN). The findings do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ministry or OSN.

### About our partners?

SE partnered with Red Cross and Care Partners to lead this research, with involvement of an interdisciplinary and cross-jurisdictional Advisory Committee.

### For more information about this project, please contact:

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Or read:

Giosa J, Holyoke P, Bender D, Tudge S, Gifford W. Observe Coach, Assist, and Report: An Emerging Framework for Integrating Unregulated Healthcare Providers into Interdisciplinary Healthcare teams. *Journal of Research in Interprofessional Practice and Practice*. 2015 October 2015;5(2). Available [here](#).

### About the Saint Elizabeth Research Centre

Saint Elizabeth has made a strategic commitment to research — \$10 million over 10 years.

At the Saint Elizabeth Research Centre, we study the needs of people, their caregivers, and health care providers to develop innovative solutions to improve health and care experiences across the continuum for more effective approaches to care. The Research Centre has four areas of focus: integrated care and transitions, end of life care, caregivers, and person and family centred care.

Our goal is to improve people's health and care. We work on innovative solutions for tough problems.

*We see possibilities everywhere.*