

REPORT, ARRC B.C. Webinar

“Care for and Cared About: Nursing in Long Term Care”

Michelle and Hanif from the B.C. Nurses’ Union

On September 27, 2023, the fourth presentation in ARRC’s webinar series on quality of life in long-term care featured Michelle Sordal and her colleague Hanif who spoke on behalf of the B.C. Nurses’ Union. The presentation was attended by 36 participants.

Michelle noted that BCNU members who work in long-term care total 6,800. The union represents Registered Nurses, Registered Psychiatric Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses and in some facilities, other care workers.

She talked about the importance of relationships in the work of nurses and care workers, thoughtfully defining what is often called “relational care”. This philosophy includes the use of listening, asking questions, and offering compassion. Participants were invited to share their thoughts about, and definitions of, relational care in the chat box.

Michelle shared reflections from several nurses who talked about what giving care to residents means to them. One interesting thought related to how much work in long-term care is “invisible” or hidden – for example, the support that nurses and other team members give to residents as they care for them.

The steadily increasing acuity in long-term care was highlighted as a concern – numbers of people living with dementia are increasing, also numbers of younger residents. As well, facility populations are now more diverse, requiring culturally safe, inclusive care environments for all.

Michelle talked about the harsh impacts of COVID-19 on residents, families and nurses. Key examples included the policies that separated residents from their loved ones and restricted their access to the expertise of allied professional team members, and also shortages of PPE for staff. The pandemic also exacerbated the existing nursing shortage and challenges with short staffing continue to this day. A recent StatsCan report states that over 28,000 RN and RPN positions are currently vacant.

These alarming statistics led to a discussion of the need for mandated nurse/resident ratios in long-term care; recent union/management negotiations have addressed this issue. Michelle quoted a 2022 report from the B.C. Seniors Advocate indicating that most B.C. facilities are not currently meeting the suggested 3.36 hours/day per resident.

In concluding remarks, Michelle’s colleague Hanif spoke to the importance of relational care and the need for continuity of care which requires a stable staffing base. He confirmed that society and BCNU are in agreement that environments which facilitate relationship care must be provided for residents in long-term care.

In closing, Michelle quoted the B.C. Seniors Advocate Isabel Mackenzie's comments in a 2017 report which emphasized the need for B.C. to increase staffing levels, increase freedom for residents and expand conversations about loneliness in long-term care.

Thank you to Michelle and Hanif for a thoughtful and informative webinar.