

The Home Care Environment:

“How can we do everything we need to do?”

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Home Care in Canada

- Over 900,000 Canadians received home care in 2008
- Fastest growing segment of health care
- Expected to grow by 60% in the next ten years
- Key challenges:
 - ↑ complexity and acuity of home care clients
 - High turnover and chronic staff shortages, in part due to lower wages and benefits, isolation, stress
 - 70-80% home care staff are support workers, typically uncredentialed, usually female and often visible minorities

Worklife in Home Care

- Home care nurses have been included in large studies of worklife, although completion rates have been relatively low
- Instruments used were often developed for acute care and hospital settings and may not be representative of home care practice (McGillis-Hall et al., 2006, p. 41)
- Much of the work to date on quality work life has focused on institutional environments



Home Care Worklife

- Objective: identify the challenges faced by nurses and home health aides in terms of workload management and the ability to address client needs
- Participants: 8 nurses and 11 aides employed by an urban regional health authority in Western Canada participated
 - All female, average age 43 years, worked in home care average of 9 years
- Approach: Interpretive description of transcripts from 3 focus group sessions



Nurses: Increasing Complexity and Acuity

“There’s more and more care that used to be done in the hospital that’s being offloaded onto home care...but we just keep getting told we have to manage with what we have...It’s scary, some of the things we have to look after now.”



Nurses: Communication

- “Sometimes I feel like I’m working in a vacuum...We have to sketch together what happened in the hospital”
- “I hope I’m still working when they bring the electronic health record in...That will really help to fix the problems we have with communication between us in the community and the hospital”

Nurses: Unmet Needs

“Doesn't seem like anyone is checking if things get done...it feels like we're flying by seat of our pants and things are getting missed”

“We have sort out the essentials from the things that are more comfort...we used to be able to provide more holistic care... you know, see the whole person, but there's no time for that any more”



HHA: Increasing Acuity and Complexity

- “You wouldn’t believe how many people with dementia live alone and the only ones they have to help them is us...If something went wrong, it would be our heads on the chopping block ‘cause they really should be in nursing homes”
- “There’s more mentally ill clients now than I remember from before...I never got taught how to work with them, but I’ve got street smarts, so we get along somehow”

HHAs: Feeling unheard and unvalued

“I can’t make any decisions on my own...I call into the office and give my report, but I never know if anyone ever gets my report...I never hear back”

“I write down important things that the nurses should know about the clients, but I don’t think there’s even one that bothers to read the book...Guess I’m just wasting my time”



HHAs: Need for Education

- “I never got taught things that are really important for my clients...Had to figure out how to use the Food Bank by myself”
- “Lots of kids freeload off their parents. I just leave if there’s a party or something going on when I come...but it’s the poor client who suffers. I sure would like to know what I could do about this”
- “I guess it’s too expensive to give us inservices the way they do with the nurses...it might save money in the long run, though”

Technology

- “We still do everything on paper and by phone...You would think that with all the fancy computer programs they have now, that someone would have figured out that it might make things a bit easier for everyone”
- “They’ve been talking about giving us Blackberries [with GPS], but I think that’s just a way to make sure they know where we are”

HHAs: Safety Concerns

“It’s hard to believe the way people live sometimes...I know it costs a lot to keep up a home, but sometimes it’s just plain unsanitary”

“I’ve had my car broken into a couple times when I was doing a home visit and my bag stolen...must have thought I was carrying drugs”

“Some people just don’t restrain their animals...they don’t realize that not everyone likes dogs”



Conclusions

- Increasing pressures on home care staff can create precarious care for clients and a disempowering worklife for nurses and HHA
- Investments in home care staff education and technology are urgently needed to deal with the projected boom in this sector
- Interventions to promote safety for clients and workers as well as effective care in the home must be the target of future research