

EXPLORING MEALTIME EXPERIENCES OF FAMILIES LIVING WITH DEMENTIA IN LONG-TERM CARE: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

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Background:

Up to 90% of long-term care (LTC) residents live with cognitive impairment, dementia being the most reported. As dementia progresses, so do challenges with eating independently. Mealtime interventions improve staff-resident relationships and reduce the risk of malnutrition for residents. Less is known about family-resident relationships.

Methods: Constructivist grounded theory with a patient-oriented approach. Data generation via individual interviews with 14 family caregivers of people living with dementia in LTC in Saskatchewan.

Results: The theory of “Nutrition as Family’s Bridge to Dementia Care in LTC” comprises four themes for characterizing how families living with dementia build and preserve relationships through nutrition care and dining: 1) Nutrition as a Reflection of Dementia Progression, 2) Appreciating Who the Resident is on Their Dementia Journey, 3) Barriers and Facilitators to Family Involvement, and 4) Finding the Right Path.



Approximately half of LTC residents are malnourished. Malnutrition is preventable with appropriate nutrition care.

Nutrition care comprises the social, physiological, therapeutic, and supportive aspects of food and fluid intake

Mealtime is the main activity for nutrition care



THE GROUNDED THEORY: “NUTRITION AS FAMILY’S BRIDGE TO DEMENTIA CARE IN LTC”

“I think food is a really, really important part of how we understand him at this stage and how we know where he’s at.”

“Swallowing is becoming more laborious and it’s taking [dad] longer to eat, so they’ve moved him to the table where he’s assisted... it was a really hard transition for us... it’s sort of bringing on a new level or intensity of grief... now that he’s not feeding himself, it’s harder.”

“At mealtimes, usually we tend to clear out. We know we wouldn’t be fed and it would make my mom feel awkward... She used to have everybody over, relatives and you’d always have a friend over... she still has that in there, she wants to feed you when you’re there. So it’s awkward.”

“I hope they continue to ask him to say grace at the meals because I think that gives him purpose and it’s kind of this shadow of a reminder of who he was... I struggle with trying to find the balance between honouring who he was and accepting who he is.”

I feel like we’re a team... It’s going to be really hard, but we feel like we’re doing the right thing... And I’m so glad that we have an enlightened manager. So, the one side of me is happy that [my husband’s] made his decision, it’s the right decision. And then the other side of me is heartbroken because I’m losing him.”

