Hope in Day to Day Living of Residents in Long-Term Care
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Background
Hope can have an important influence on the health and wellbeing of people of all ages. Having hope can help people through a variety of difficult circumstances in their lives (Herth, 2005; Moore, 2005; Wilson, et al., 2010). A group of researchers asked 10 seniors with dementia to describe their experiences of hope. They expressed that hope was a key part of their lives, always changing, but crucial to how they related to the world (Wolverson, Clarke, & Moniz-Cook, 2010). Other researchers found that end of life care patients created their own version of hope by “acknowledging ‘life the way it is,’ searching for meaning, and positive reappraisal” (Duggleby & Wright, 2009, p. 71). It was by transforming the definition of hope that these patients were able to gain new hope.

Seniors frequently enter a care centre if they can no longer care for themselves or have lost a caregiver (often a spouse). The transition into long-term care can challenge the ability of seniors to maintain hope. Care facilities provide programming to help seniors keep up functional ability and enjoy their lives. Hope is about imagining a future that one would want to participate in. Hope is necessary for seniors to maintain a good quality of life while living in long-term care.

Wilson et al. (2010) conducted a hope intervention study in which they found that “a simple cheerful greeting was more effective for relieving depression and instilling hope than a four-week program of carefully planned and constructed hope interventions” (p. 5). While there may be other explanations for this finding, there is a clear need for more studies using hope as an intervention method.

Objectives
The objectives of this project were as follows:
1. Use hope intentionally as a strategy (a ‘hope intervention’) for fostering hope in a small group program for residents in long-term care.
2. Assess the impact of this program from the resident’s perspective.
3. Develop a facilitator’s guide as a prototype for use in other long-term care settings.

The question guiding this work was, “What is the experience of older adults participating in a hope-focused group?”

Method
Residents of a long-term care facility participated in a group intervention. Ten female participants between the ages of 75 and 99 participated in the study. This study was based on the assumption that having hope contributes to quality of life.

Each group session followed the same format beginning with a recap of the previous session, then a reading about the week’s theme. Specific questions guided discussion of the theme. Each session concluded with a summary and a reading assignment for the following week.

Participants were involved in a semi-structured interview before the group sessions started and again after conclusion of the group sessions. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.
Before intervention interview questions included:
- What is your understanding of hope?
- What does hope mean to you?
- What helps you to hope?

After intervention interview questions included:
- What is your understanding of hope now?
- What was it like to participate in a group that focused on hope?

During the sessions, the group leaders took notes. They recorded important statements, the general mood of the group, and observations about the conversation. Transcripts and session notes were coded for key words or statements. A series of collaborative discussions were held to determine the coding scheme and analysis. These discussions of theme offered insights into the participants' experiences in the group, and how this experience promoted hope.

Results
Three key themes that represented the participant’s perception of hope emerged from the before intervention and after intervention interviews: hope as future, hope as acceptance, and hope as fuel. Even though the participants were in the later stages of their lives, they still talked about hope for a better tomorrow. They portrayed hope as realistic - a hope in which they accepted their current health. They described hope as a fuel that supplies the energy and encouragement to continue on through difficult times.

Five key themes emerged from the analysis of the participants’ experiences of being in the group. These included, building a sense of community, giving and receiving support, accepting their experiences as normal, developing a more positive perspective, and thinking intentionally about hope.

On several occasions, the participants said how much they liked being part of the group and hearing the stories of the group members. They described feeling like part of a community, and enjoying the “fellowship”. Through hearing and telling stories, they participated in giving and receiving support in a way they had not done before the hope intervention.

Conclusions
The findings of this study highlight the importance of hope in the day-to-day lives of residents in long-term care. The research suggests that hope is strengthened through community. Hope is a necessary ingredient for a good quality of life. By fostering hope, it is possible for health care professionals to contribute to their patients’ quality of life in long-term care.

Lessons Learned
A limitation of this study was that the participants were all female. Future studies should reproduce this work with mixed-gender participant groups. Additionally, we chose to use a qualitative research design; in future work, it would be interesting to measure hope using quantitative tools.

The full report can be found at www.mentalhealthresearch.ca

References


**About the Author:** Sue Hall is pastoral care nurse at Beverly Centre Glenmore. Her topics of interest include spiritual care, hope in long-term care, pain management, group processes, and end of life care.