CRGI SNAPSHOT

Enhancing Quality of Life for Seniors with Dementia in Assisted Living Settings: A Review of the Literature and Current Promising Practices
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Background
There are approximately 500,000 people living with dementia in Canada today. By 2038, this number is expected to grow to over 1.2 million, or 2.8% of the population (Alzheimer Society of Canada, 2010). Alzheimer’s disease is the most common cause of dementia, and results in a progressive decline in cognition that impacts daily life and functioning. Eventually, affected individuals require full time support to ensure that their safety and daily life needs are met.

Long-term care has traditionally been the setting that was available to individuals with Alzheimer’s disease or related dementias. However, there are now more housing and support options within the community. As a result, individuals with dementia are residing in other contexts, many of which are labelled assisted living.

In Alberta, there has been a recent provincial direction to expand the availability of assisted living, focusing on supporting Albertans, including seniors with dementia, to “age in the right place” (Alberta Health and Wellness, 2008). As a result, there will be a need to accommodate the unique and complex needs of seniors with dementia who live in settings which are not designed to provide dementia-specific care and support.

Objectives
The main objective of this project was to conduct a comprehensive review of available research on promising practices and methods of care and support for individuals with dementia residing in assisted living settings.

The specific objectives are as follows:
1. Identify promising practices relevant to dementia assisted living settings that will stimulate and encourage independence of residents with dementia.
2. Identify services, activities, and social programs based on published evidence that will increase residents’ quality of life.

Examples of promising practices are activities, programs, services, interventions, assessments, and outcome measures. We based our search on promising practices because this captures interesting, but still unproven ideas, unlike best practices, which are already established.

Method
A literature review was conducted using a diverse set of search terms to capture a comprehensive collection of literature. From the 1,927 articles identified (1,007 after removal of duplicates), 19 were selected for detailed consideration using a progressive filter of inclusion criteria. The main points of each article were extracted with particular attention paid to recommendations and examples of promising practices. The results were then grouped into categories.
Results
The following are some of the key findings from the literature review, divided into categories:

- **Staffing (education and development)**
  - Standardizing training, including training dialogue, manuals, and trainer support has positive effects on those receiving training (Fletcher, Zimmerman, Preisser, Mitchell, Beeber, & Reed, 2010A; Fletcher et al., 2010B).

- **Social**
  - Caregiver attitudes strongly influence the social environments of assisted living settings (Teitelman, Raber, & Watts, 2010).
  - Memory loss support groups can help residents, families, and staff reduce feelings of isolation, increase self-esteem and well-being, and provide intellectual stimulation (Yale & Kaplan, 2006).

- **Safety**
  - Person-centred approaches, consistency in care, and consistent relationships with care providers are recommended (Reed & Tilly, 2008).
    - Wandering can be reduced by making environments more home-like.
    - Falls can be reduced by encouraging exercise, including strength training.
    - Use of physical restraints can be reduced by tailoring care to residents.

- **Physical**
  - Gardens can be used as a therapeutic tool to improve residents’ quality of life (Hernandez, 2007).

- **Other (Cognitive training)**
  - A combination of resident cognitive training and individual computer training reduced decline and may have improved cognitive and behavioural functioning in older adults with dementia (Mate-Kole et al., 2007).

- **Emotional well-being**
  - Caregiver hope was positively associated resident quality of life (Spector & Orrell, 2006).

- **Mixed**
  - Physical environment quality was positively correlated with quality of life scores for residents (Bicket et al., 2010).
  - Residents’ showed an improvement in performance of activities of daily living following an individualized intervention program that included caregiver training in verbal cueing/reinforcement and environmental modification (Chard, Liu, & Mulholland, 2009).

Conclusions
This research project outlined the major findings of the literature review conducted on promising practices for dementia clients in assisted living environments. We discovered promising practices relevant to several different areas.

The results of this research project were used to inform student research projects, academic presentations, and communications to the local research community. The results also supported the environmental and program design of a new secured dementia assisted living setting (Shepherd’s Care Vanguard), which opened in 2011. Future policy and practice decisions about dementia care in assisted living could also be supported by the results of this research project.

Lessons Learned
Research evidence of promising practices for assisted living dementia care is growing quickly and can inform policy and practice development at all levels. One way to do this is to identify features and components of assisted living settings that have a positive effect on residents.

The full report can be found at [www.mentalhealthresearch.ca](http://www.mentalhealthresearch.ca)
References

About the Authors: The primary investigator, Suzanne Maisey (formerly with Shepherd’s Care Foundation) is a gerontologist and experienced senior manager within Alberta’s seniors housing and continuing care sector. She is known for successfully leading quality improvements, innovations, and organizational change, as well as having a special commitment to dementia care advancement.
Anna Little (Shepherd’s Care Foundation) was the grant applicant for this project. Her areas of interest include seniors, dementia, continuing care, and caregivers.