

Promising Practices In Research Use

Organizations investing in people, processes, and structures to increase their capacity to use research

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Providing more choices for those who depend on ventilators:

How a health authority is using evidence to decrease pressure on acute and long-term care

The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) is dealing with several interrelated pressures common to healthcare organizations, including the need to reduce wait times and to improve co-ordination and continuity of care between care sectors. One specific challenge facing the WRHA is to address the needs of the growing number of people, from both the adult and pediatric populations, who depend on ventilators – machines that help them breathe.

Helen Clark is the WRHA's regional director of respiratory therapy and a fellow of the Executive Training for Research Application (EXTRA) program¹. She says that because of their complex and varied needs, ventilator-dependent clients have few housing options available to them. "Some people try to manage at home, even when they no longer should, or go into long-term care, which many would prefer to avoid," explains Clark. "Others remain in acute care, which puts additional strain in that area."

The WRHA recognized the need to create community-based alternatives for those who depend on ventilators. As a first step, Clark and her team conducted an evidence review that examined the experiences of other jurisdictions. The evidence showed that the successful community housing models allowed people to live somewhat independently, but grouped

Key Messages


- **The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) is building capacity in community care for those who depend on ventilators, a group with varied and complex medical issues and limited living options.**
- **Informed by evidence about successful models of community care for ventilator-dependent people, the WRHA's project aims to reduce pressures in acute and long-term care, increase the housing choices for those dependent on ventilators, and improve the transition from one care sector to another.**
- **The project is changing the organization's thinking about care management across sectors and the role of allied health providers.**

together to ensure efficient use of resources. The successful models also involved respiratory therapists – experts in cardio-pulmonary assessment, airway management, and monitoring and support services.

From the evidence, it was determined that ventilator-dependent clients could be safely managed in community settings if proper

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¹ The EXTRA program is supported by a group of partnering organizations and managed by the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation. More information about this program and its partners can be found at www.chsrf.ca/extra.



support was in place. This meant that WRHA respiratory therapists – who traditionally operated solely in acute care – could transfer their knowledge and apply it to many roles *outside* acute care, including discharge planning and case management in the community. This, combined with clinical support and education for clients, their families and caregivers, could improve continuity of care and decrease emergency department visits and hospital admissions.

With the support of Ten Ten Sinclair Housing Inc., a local organization that manages housing units for disabled and non-disabled tenants, eight suites were developed for ventilator-dependent clients. Full-time attendant care was part of the package, which included the services of a case co-ordinator and a staff respiratory therapist.

The first resident arrived in the spring of 2008 from an acute care setting. Others from long-term care settings are currently lined up for a trial residency. “Even moving a small number of people from an acute or long-term care setting can help relieve pressure, not to mention improve the lives of those in the new setting,” says Neil Johnston, regional manager of acute and community respiratory therapy.

Based on the success of this initial project, five beds are now being planned for ventilator-dependent children who previously had no option other than an acute care setting. The project has also caused a fundamental shift in thinking about living options for people with complex medical conditions; for example, Ten Ten Sinclair Housing has a new perspective on the types of facilities it may build in the future.

Clark says that the evidence review helped in many ways, including recognizing the full scope of the issue and identifying potential solutions. “Very importantly,” she adds, “it helped us develop a strong business case for funding the project.” And for the WRHA, the project has not only eased pressure on acute and long-term care, but has also shown how allied health disciplines can be part of the solution to system issues. “It’s helped break down the boundaries”, explains Johnston, “so that we are more efficient, seamless, and respectful in moving people through care transitions.”

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