
Subject: Medical Directors Annual Report 2023 – Long-Term Care Homes

Report To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, May 7, 2024

Recommendations

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the 2023 Annual Reports submitted by the Medical Directors (MD's) of Niagara Region's eight long-term care (LTC) homes.
- Under the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021 each home is required to have a Medical Director. The Medical Director fulfills functions including:
 - the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of medical services,
 - advising on and approving clinical policies and procedures, and
 - communication of expectations to Attending Physicians and registered nurses in the extended class, including communicating relevant medical policies and procedures.
- Medical Directors also ensure 24/7 medical coverage for the home and residents and oversee the Attending Physicians in their home.

Financial Considerations

As per the Fixing Long-Term Care Act (FLTCA) and the Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC) Level-of Care Per Diem funding policy. Medical Directors are issued a payment through the Nursing and Personal Care funding envelope.

Analysis

Annually, the Medical Directors of each LTC home provide an analysis of the medical program in the home and identify key emerging themes. This year the Medical Directors' feedback was related to the changing profile of long-term care residents, hospital system pressures, challenges with hospital transfers and opportunities identified to decrease unnecessary transfers to hospital.

The steady trend of increasing care complexity continued throughout 2023. Care needs are escalating and medical acuity is rising. The medical profile of residents in long-term care homes today is consistent with patients who would have been cared for in hospital 10 years ago and the typical long-term care residents from 2014 now lives in a retirement home or in their own home in the community.

Many residents admitted into the homes are medically complex, with co-morbidities, complex medication needs, and responsive behaviours as well as mental health concerns. The long-term care home teams are very diligent about reviewing applicant clinical documentation and asking questions prior to admission to ensure the care needs of the applicant are clear and that the team can safely care for new admissions.

A transfer to hospital is a difficult experience for residents given current hospital pressures and long wait times in the emergency department. Seniors Services has had a strong focus on decreasing unnecessary transfers to hospital. Investment in nurse practitioners, diagnostic equipment, enhanced staffing, and staff capacity building, all help to decrease the need for transfer to hospital to address medical needs.

When a transfer to hospital is necessary, there are continued challenges with resident transfers between hospital and long-term care homes. There are many instances when residents are returned from hospital without any communication or information provided on their return, to explain what the diagnostics / interventions / medications were administered or what future follow-up looks like. Residents are sometimes discharged back to long-term care with medical orders that a long-term care home is unable to provide; for example an order that requires monitoring with daily bloodwork, a level of service to which the long-term care sector does not have access. Physicians commented that when a resident passes away in hospital, the hospital often does not provide notification and rarely shares the cause of death.

Several successful improvement initiatives, focused on decreasing unnecessary resident transfers to hospital, have been implemented. For example, Medical Directors are proactively having conversations with families to educate them to critically consider if a transfer to hospital is necessary. The Medical Director conversations with families are helping residents and families to make informed decisions to support the overall wellbeing of residents.

Another example of an improvement initiative is the introduction of Nurse Practitioners into the homes. Having a full-time Nurse Practitioner on staff enhances the care of residents and increases the nursing standards in the homes. Nurse Practitioners are

beneficial in ensuring timely access to primary care and care-continuity for complex residents. Nurse Practitioners manage the day-to-day concerns, daily medical management, facilitate health teaching conversations with residents and families and assess acute illnesses. The NP also provides staff education for the nursing team including 'goals of care' conversations, hypodermoclysis teaching to mitigate the risk of dehydration, laceration glue training to treat skin tears and more.

Several quality improvement initiatives have been implemented to support medical directors and physicians to be able to complete their work as efficiently as possible. For example, nurses support the physicians in the review of laboratory results by triaging laboratory report results. Another example is Secure Messaging, an application introduced in 2023 that enables medical directors and physicians to leverage technology to provide remote orders for medical guidance, treatments, and medications. This supports timely response to resident care needs.

Some additional opportunities the Medical Directors have identified to further enhance medical care and to decrease the need for resident transfers to the emergency department include:

- Permitting long-term care homes to book appointments directly with the outpatient fracture clinic rather than accessing the clinic through the emergency department
- Enhanced access to lab services
- Enhanced access to diagnostic imaging services

The team in Seniors Services is working in collaboration with the Medical Directors and community partners to explore how to action the opportunities outlined above.

Alternatives Reviewed

There are no alternatives to this report, which as been provided for information. These activities, and associated reporting, must be undertaken by Niagara Region as part of its governance responsibilities under the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Effective Region – Remaining an employer of choice by transforming service delivery in a way that is innovative, collaborative and fiscally responsible.

Other Pertinent Reports

COM 4, 2024, Seniors Services Quality Improvement Report: January – March 2023, February 6, 2024.

COM 27, 2022, Seniors Services Quality Improvement Report: January – March 2023, December 7, 2023.

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