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END-OF-LIFE NURSING EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

*Advancing Palliative Care*

## Unlicensed Staff: Caring for Older Adults in Long-term Care During the Pandemic

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## Target Audience

- Certified Nursing Assistant
- Home Health Aide
- Hospice Aide
- Healthcare or Direct Care Worker
- Personal Care Assistant
- Unlicensed Personnel

# Objectives

- Describe the current pandemic and the risks for older adults and those living in long-term care settings.
- Identify palliative care needs for older adults and the role of unlicensed care staff who work in these settings.
- Explain the importance of communication and ways to augment care practices that support physical, psychosocial and spiritual well-being.
- Discuss goals of care and care at the time of death.

# Current Pandemic

- SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19 or novel coronavirus
- Evolving status and continuous update
  - Symptoms
  - Mitigation



CDC, 2020a

# Vulnerable Population: Older Adults

- Chronic conditions
- Demographic characteristics
- Age-related changes
- COVID-19 risks

ACL, 2020; AFAR, 2020; CDC, 2020b; CDC, 2020c, Garg et al., 2020; Golden, 2020

# Risks in Long-term Care

- Mortality and vulnerability
- Congregate setting
- National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF)
  - Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, Recovery



Carpenter & Ersek, 2019; CDC, 2020g; Commonwealth of Virginia, 2020; Homeland Security, 2019;

# Pandemic Management

- Potential scenarios
- Transfers to different locations
- Changing and evolving situation
- Oversight and investigations



ARC & AAN, 2020; IHI, 2020

# Working with Palliative Care and Hospice Teams

- What is palliative care?
- What is hospice?
- Patients with serious illness
- Role in long-term care and pandemic

NCP, 2018; NQF, 2006:  
O'Neill & Morrison, 2018;



# Optimizing Care During an Infectious Disease Pandemic

- Safety is primary and infection control
- Uncertainty for staff and residents
- Vulnerability of residents: “Compassionate care”
- Palliative care approaches are necessary



# Palliative Care Approaches

- Unlicensed care staff at the bedside
- Eyes and ears of professional nursing staff
- Report changes in resident's condition
- Safe and exemplary care is necessary
- All care is person-centered

# Communication

- The foundation of palliative care
- Essential information and greatest fears
- Barriers to good communication
- Team care is necessary



Choan, 2019; Cotter & Foxwell, 2019;  
Dahlin & Wittenberg, 2019; Long, 2016

# Communication

- Older adult and family expectations for communication
- Promote unconditional acceptance and continuing emotional support
- Overcome barriers to effective communication
- Engage in effective communication strategies



Dahlin & Wittenberg, 2019

# Physical Aspects of Care

- Patients with COVID-19
  - Monitor for primary symptoms and report
  - Emergency: trouble breathing, persistent chest pain or pressure, new confusion or inability to arouse, bluish lips or face
  - Other: lethargic, delirium, person is “just not the same”
- Others on palliative care or hospice



CDC, 2020a

# Pain and Symptom Management

- Self-report and those who are unable to capture incidence of pain
- Significant change in condition – report to nursing staff
- Monitor for unseen decline and exacerbation or new geriatric syndromes
- Pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic interventions are necessary

AMDA & AALNA, 2020;  
Health in Aging Foundation, 2017

# Primary Symptoms

- Look for primary symptoms
  - Shortness of breath and cough
  - Fever
  - Pain: muscle and headache, sore throat
  - Chills, shakes, new loss of taste or smell
- Observe symptoms, report observations and characteristics, observe and report side effects of medications, deliver nonpharmacologic treatments

CDC, 2020a

# Shortness of Breath and Cough

- Shortness of breath and cough: report to nursing staff and record in the medical record
- Monitor respirations and distress; self-rating is important
- If oxygen is administered, monitor accuracy and usage
- Medications may be administered; observe and report effectiveness



Donesky, 2019

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# Fever and Pain

- Report to nursing staff fever and/or pain
- Self-report for pain is key or use other rating tools for those who cannot self-report
- Interventions:
  - Monitor patterns, resolution, other complaints
  - Medications
  - Non-drug options

Malone et al., 2020

# Psychological and Social Aspects of Care

- Separation from staff, residents and family
  - Lack of physical contact and loss
  - Diminished communication
- Effects of isolation:
  - Emotional responses: fear, loneliness, depression, grief



# Psychological and Social Interventions

- Improve communication; isolation is detrimental
- Monitor emotional and health status
- Routine, scheduled rounds
- Activities of daily living are not just tasks to be completed
- Genuine and meaningful and connections are essential



Zhao et al., 2019

# Spiritual Aspects of Care

- Heightened awareness during the pandemic
- What is spirituality?
- Be aware of spiritual distress
- Support older adult's beliefs and practices



HPNA, 2015; NCCN, 2019; Puchalski & Ferrell, 2010

# Spirituality Interventions

- Be *with* the person, physically and emotionally
- Promote hope
- Remain nonjudgmental and listen
- Respect and support; be present in the moment



Cotter & Foxwell, 2019

# Supporting Families of Residents in Long-term Care

- The family unit in jeopardy during the pandemic
- Expectations from family members need to be honored
- Advocacy
  - Goals of care
  - Advance care planning

# Supporting Families of Residents in Long-term Care (con't)

- Plan ahead: goals of care and possible transfers
- Maintain hope
- Messages to the dying
- Self-care and perception of control

Cotter & Foxwell, 2019

# Final Days and Time of Death

- Location of death for older adults
- Dying is a sacred journey
- Unlicensed care staff roles at end of life are extremely important
- Physical, psychological, social, spiritual aspects of care
- Signs that death has occurred



Berry & Griffie, 2019; CMS, 2020a;  
Long, 2019; NHPCO, 2018



# Unlicensed Care Staff in Long-term Care: The Human Toll

- Self-care and resilience
- Stress and fatigue
- Grief
- Supportive care

CDC, n.d., Dewey et al., 2020; Kravits, 2019

# Staff in Long-term Care Settings and Palliative Care: Care Attributes

- Trustworthiness
- Imagination
- Beauty
- Space
- Presence

Lanzeby & Moore, 2019

# Summary

- Unlicensed long-term care staff have a critical role in caring for older adults who are seriously ill and at the end of life.
- It is important to address physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs of residents.
- Excellent communication skills and working with the team and family members during difficult times is essential.