

### Spotlight on collaborative & client-centred seniors' care

**July 18, 2013** – There is one story that Gerri Yerxa particularly likes to tell about the work that she does.

Yerxa, who is based at the Fort Frances branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association, is a Psychogeriatric Resource Consultant (PRC) for the Behavioural Supports Ontario (BSO) Project in the Rainy River District.

BSO was launched in 2011 to enhance the care and support given to seniors, their families, and caregivers, as they live and cope with responsive behaviours associated with dementia, mental illness, addictions and other neurological conditions. Yerxa's job is to increase the capacity of front-line seniors' caregivers and to offer supportive resources when required.

The story she tells is about one particular older woman at a long-term care home who suffers from both dementia and depression. The resident rarely ate. She refused to leave her room. Her weight had declined dramatically, her mobility was dangerously reduced, and she was increasingly agitated. Staff at the home grew deeply concerned, and began to believe that the woman was going to die.

After spending time with the resident, Yerxa drew up a plan that she and the staff believed would best meet the woman's individual care needs. The plan included extensive monitoring, one-on-one support for the resident, and a reassessment of her medications. Yerxa says that she was most impressed by the staff's cooperation and support.

"There was no pushback, no sense that I was an outsider coming in to tell them what to do. There was a feeling that if this woman was going to be helped, we were all going to have to work together to create and execute the best possible plan. And more than anything else, everybody there wanted to help her."

The staff's willingness to collaborate and commitment to the resident paid off. Today the woman gets up and dresses herself. She goes for walks, and she gets her hair done. Because she regularly walks into the dining room for a meal, her weight is back up to a healthy range.

For Yerxa, that story reflects her job, in a nutshell. Between them, she and another PRC provide support, tools, resources, training and education to staff in nine long-term care homes across the Kenora and Rainy River Districts. They have an outreach team composed of one registered nurse and four full-time equivalent personal support workers.

"We have a great team, but there is absolutely no way we can give patients the support they need on our own," she says. "That's why we conducted 79 educational sessions to more than a thousand professional caregivers in a 12-month period. We need to give long-term care staff and other caregivers the specialized knowledge and tools they need so they can help people who are upset, scared, and dealing with dementia and other complex issues. Basically, we need to teach them not to need us."

### BSO in Northwestern Ontario *...by the numbers*

**\$1,215,000**

Base funding invested by the North West LHIN in the care of older adults with responsive behaviours

**2,400**

People in the health care sector trained across the region on the management of responsive behaviours

**20.6**

Additional full-time, front-line workers to support new programs and services

**4**

Organizations in the North West LHIN working together to form the Regional Behavioural Health Service

In this individual case, a collaborative planning and decision-making approach ensured that staff became more confident to meet the client's needs and she enjoyed a better quality of life as a result. This "train-the-trainer" model is also significant on a broader level, since hundreds of nurses, personal support workers, students, and other health care providers are now equipped with the necessary skills to continue this important work and to improve the care experiences for many other seniors in the region.

There is no question that enhancing the skills and knowledge of front-line staff is critical. While Yerxa still does some 50 patient consultations per year in addition to her education work, she knows that it is education that will make the real difference down the road. And she wouldn't have it any other way.

"I love this job. Being part of a team, helping my team to help other people who need us desperately, seeing the relief our work can bring. It doesn't get better than that."

### **North West LHIN's Commitment to BSO**

The North West LHIN has implemented its Behavioural Supports Ontario (BSO) action plan, which includes the creation of a Regional Behavioural Health Service at St. Joseph's Care Group to oversee the care of older adults with responsive behaviours in the North West LHIN. As the system leader for the Regional Behavioural Health Service, St. Joseph's Care Group coordinates two PRC resources in the Kenora and Rainy River Districts, and one PRC resource in the Thunder Bay District.

Behaviours such as aggression, wandering, physical resistance and agitation are a major source of distress for patients, their caregivers and the health system. "BSO introduces the tools to improve safety for all, including residents with responsive behaviours, their peers, and the people who care for them," says Laura Kokocinski, CEO of the North West LHIN. "This person-centred collaboration across the health care system aligns with our organization's strategic directions - to improve health outcomes and access to care, as well as strive for continuous quality improvement and a system-wide culture of accountability."