

LEVERAGING SCHOOL OF NURSING RESOURCES TO IMPROVE LONG-TERM CARE

You never know when you'll stumble upon a good idea, so why leave it to chance, especially when that idea can have a dramatic impact on quality of life.

Perhaps **Nancy Watson, PhD, RN**, knew that when she and a small group of dedicated nurse colleagues were compelled to bring together people from all aspects of nursing home and dementia care, spark their interests with information, and let the networking and idea-sharing flow.

The Community Initiative to Improve Nursing Home and Dementia Care was developed with funding from the John A. Hartford Foundation and designed to initiate outreach that infuses academic programming with geriatric content among administrators and staff at long-term care residential facilities. The result is a partnership that leverages the School's assets to benefit those who operate, work at, and live in long-term care facilities in and around the Rochester region.

"Taking a grassroots, community-needs based approach, we surveyed 120 long-term care facilities in upstate New York to identify priority concerns around long-term dementia care," said Watson. Results of that survey became the basis of the initiative's outreach, which includes:

- Interdisciplinary workshops with take-home resources

- Online support through an e-mail network and Web site
- Yearly conferences featuring national experts. "From the beginning, our philosophy has been to empower and support direct-care workers to bring about systemic change to long-term care facilities by respecting, acknowledging and rewarding their contributions and by helping them gain more knowledge and new skills," Watson said.

In just three years, Watson estimates they've touched the lives of over 10,000 long-term care residents, through the participation of about 800 providers representing more than 100 facilities. As word of the initiatives' useful and relevant programming spread, participation has grown. One main reason it has worked is the initiative's responsiveness to participants' interests and needs.

"When we started, we surveyed all area facilities and asked them what their priorities are, what they were most concerned about," Watson explained. "From there, three focus areas were established that would become the basis for our joint programming and education."

Those priority areas are staffing retention and recruitment, behavioral/safety issues, and palliative care.

This initiative is unique in that its offerings are not just

geared to administrators or managers, but to those who work in all areas of long-term care, from medical directors and social workers to regulators, therapists and nurse assistants.

"We welcome all comers," said Watson, "with the goal of building a network and a collegiality with one another as well as letting them know that, regardless of their role in caring for residents, they are valued and acknowledged."

In addition to providing a forum for education, these gatherings sparked conversation and idea sharing.

At the yearly conferences, participants hear from nationally recognized experts. Most recently, Marcia K. Flesner, RN, author of "Person-Centered Care: A Model for Nursing Homes," presented the topic *Creating a Nursing Home Where People Want to Live*.

The conferences include a forum for information sharing and participants are invited to present posters on innovations they have created in their own facilities. "The posters give participants an opportunity to shine and to share ideas with peers from other facilities," Watson said. From the posters, attendees vote to select the best ideas and the top three choices are presented with plaques. But it means more than recognition; these ideas can change lives. Mina Preston is evidence of that.

"It was the best workshop I ever went to," said Preston. A recreation specialist at The Jewish Home in Rochester, Preston created a "Simple Pleasures Cart" patterned after an idea she learned about from a poster presentation. The carts contain activities for all the senses, and are used for one-on-one visits with residents who won't or can't participate in group activities. It was so well received by Jewish Home residents that a second cart was created.

"There's something for everyone on it, and the residents really enjoy it. When I leave after a visit, they usually ask when I'll be back [with it] again," Preston said.

A similar cross-pollination took place when Carol DuMond, RN, at St. John's Home in Rochester, saw a poster at a conference presented by nursing leaders at The Hurlbut, another Rochester nursing home. The concept, consolidating medication delivery so nurses have more time to spend with residents, was later featured in "Short Takes on Long-Term Care," a periodic column in the *American Journal of Nursing* where Watson and **Margaret Lash, APN, MS, RN**, instructor in Clinical Nursing, together with their colleagues, share ideas and information, born out of the Community Initiative, with a national audience.

Nancy Watson (center) shares a playful moment using items from a "Simple Pleasures Cart" with Jewish Home resident Rita Davis (left) and recreation specialist Mina Preston.



COMMUNITY INITIATIVE FOR LONG-TERM CARE CORE COMMITTEE

What began and flourished under grant funding continues to thrive thanks to a core group that refused to quit. They are

dedicated to making a difference in improving the lives of people living in long-term care settings. “It gives us our greatest joy knowing that we’re doing something to help,” said Nancy Watson, who is joined in the group by: Margaret Lash, ANP, MS, RN, *School of Nursing/Strong Health*

Susan DeRosa, MS, APRN, BC, RN, *Unity Health System*
 Patricia Coleman, PhD, RN, APRN-BC, *School of Nursing/Iroquois Nursing Home*
 Linda Baier, MS, BC, RN, *St. John’s Home*
 Kathleen C. Plum, PhD, RN, *Monroe County Office of Mental Health*

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MORE OF A GOOD THING

While grant funding for the Community Initiative has ended, the group’s success has given momentum for it to evolve into a community sponsored organization.

“We refuse to die,” Watson said cheerfully. She and the core group of interested and enthusiastic nurse volunteers continue to meet regularly to further realize the Initiative’s

mission. Currently about 50 long-term care facilities make a small donation to support and take part in all programming and to regularly receive educational materials.

Watson has also been encouraged by The John A. Hartford Foundation to prepare journal articles to spread the word of their success so similar projects might be started in other areas.

“It’s a ripple effect of ideas significant in improving the quality of life, and quality of care, with very little investment,” Watson said, noting that their success required minimal funding and a small group of dedicated volunteers across health systems to make it possible.

It’s a partnership in its purest sense, between the

committee and the participating facilities.

“They give us ideas, we till them, cross fertilize, and help them grow,” Watson said. “From them we get great ideas for things to research and share. And, ultimately, we are helping to improve the quality of life for the many people who live in our long-term care facilities.” RN

