The Strengthening a Palliative Approach in Long-Term Care (SPA-LTC) Program: An Evaluation

BACKGROUND
• An increasing number of residents require a palliative approach to care in long-term care (LTC) homes; these settings are ill-prepared and often provide sub-optimal palliative care
• The SPA-LTC program is a novel intervention that addresses these issues by building capacity among LTC staff to improve the delivery of a palliative approach

RESEARCH TOPIC
• To evaluate the SPA-LTC program’s impact on resident, family, and staff knowledge and self-efficacy in palliative care and organization outcomes

METHODOLOGY
• Mixed methods design that included both quantitative and qualitative data from four LTC homes in Ontario
• Chart audits, family care conferences (FCCs), surveys, and focus groups were used to evaluate perceptions from staff, residents and families regarding the SPA-LTC program and gain organization

KEY FINDINGS
• Families reported feeling well-supported during FCCs and perceived them to be positive and useful
• A higher proportion of residents who participated in FCCs had dementia, suggesting a higher need for FCCS within this population
• Staff felt the comfort care rounds provided opportunity for critical reflection surrounding death
• PSW and support staff groups appeared to require more training and education on inter-professional collaboration
• Post-implementation findings included slight improvements in the appropriateness and number of ED visits and hospital admissions

CONCLUSION
• The combined interventions were effective in informing the decisions of residents and family members and were beneficial to improving palliative care skills amongst the staff
• SPA-LTC is effective in improving the delivery of a palliative approach to care in LTC settings