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Title:
Treatment Approaches for Patients with Dementia: Increasing Health Aging While Decreasing Violent and Aggressive Behavior in Skilled Nursing Facilities

Keywords:
Dementia
Severe Mental Illness
Violence
Physical and Verbal Aggression
Mental Wellness
Teams
Non-pharmacological Interventions

Background & Context:
Historically mental and behavioral problems are very prevalent in nursing home settings and usually associated amongst patients with dementia. Society is changing with aggressive behavior on the rise in nursing homes for residents with and without dementia. Physical and verbal aggression is difficult for staff to treat especially when thinking outside of the box with non-pharmacological interventions.

This presentation will highlight two successful programs to manage behaviorally challenging dementia-related and non-dementia related behaviors. The first dementia related approach is a specialized program initiated from the Department of Veterans Affairs Mental Health Services at various nursing homes in the United States called STAR-VA (Staff Training in Assisted living Residences). The second program, the Social Focus Cohort (SFC) is targeted for non-dementia patients with severe mental illness currently at the San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC) nursing home.

Methodology:
STAR-VA began with a selected group of psychologists and psychiatrists specializing in dementia from all around the United States to address behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia in a nursing home setting. Weekly conference calls involved reviewing and discussing the literature of empirically supported approaches and selected manuals/protocols, sharing experiences in the field, developing recommendations for training, along with dissemination and implementation strategies. The first pilot was completed after one year of planning.

The SFC started after a five year review of patient and provider data at the SFVAMC discovering a negative relationship between prevalence of aggression/violence, homicidal ideation, suicidal ideation, and an increase of staff team meetings. The VA nursing homes cares for primarily male patients ranging from ages 20-100, many of whom have been diagnosed with severe mental illness resulting in aggression and violence. The SFC Team addresses complex problem behaviors by restructuring systems, implementing environmental interventions, creating a specialized team approach and increasing education/training.

Findings:
STAR-VA has demonstrated significant reductions in the frequency and severity of challenging dementia related behaviors as well as symptoms of anxiety and depression. As a result from the success of this program ongoing dissemination has been forthcoming at a national level.

SFC has resulted in the following treatment outcomes: lessening of aggressive/violent behavior, lessening of symptom severity, reduction of target behaviors that impact residents' ability to function, improving ability to relate

to others, increasing activities of daily living, and overall quality of life. Since its inception, the SFC has received numerous awards substantiating it as best practice for providing care to residents with severe mental illness and creating a more safe and healthy environment for staff.

Implications:

The concept of both STAR-VA and SFC can easily be implemented into a broader health care sector both nationally and globally. The goal of this presentation is to provide other institutions the skills to initiate these programs to other facilities that care for residents in nursing homes with challenging aggressive/violent behaviors either with or without a diagnosis of dementia. The overarching success of these programs has increased the safety and wellbeing of the residents, staff, family and other visitors. STAR-VA and SFC were examples of our institution responding to unsafe working conditions which can be implemented to other health care services nationally and internationally.