

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

 PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S)
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 TITLE OF PROGRAM PROJECT (Not to exceed 72 character spaces)
 Prevention of Weight Loss in Long-Term Care Veterans

 KEYWORDS (MeSH terms only; minimum three)
 Weight loss, quality of care, quality of life, program evaluation, staffing Long-term care, quality of care, quality of life, nutrition

BRIEF STATEMENT OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES (Do not use continuation sheets)

Anticipated Impacts on Veterans' Healthcare

Unintentional weight loss is a common problem among long-term care (LTC) residents, and one that can lead to adverse and costly clinical outcomes. VA facilities report an even higher prevalence of weight loss than do community facilities. The average prevalence of weight loss reported for community homes was 8.6% versus 11.7% for VA homes in 2005. These data suggest that weight loss and related nutritional care processes are at least as problematic in VA facilities as in community facilities. This program evaluation project will utilize existing VA staffing resources to improve care in the areas of nutrition, hydration, and unintentional weight loss.

Project Background/Rationale

Numerous studies have shown that many LTC residents receive inadequate staff assistance with eating, which places them at risk for under-nutrition, dehydration and weight loss. Moreover, improvements in feeding assistance care have been shown to improve residents' daily food and fluid consumption and weight loss outcomes. However, these improvements have only been achieved through the use of research staff as opposed to indigenous LTC staff due to staffing resource limitations that exist in most LTC facilities. The purpose of this program evaluation project is to train indigenous LTC staff how to improve nutritional care within the constraints of existing staffing resources.

Project Objectives

The PI of this proposal has developed standardized assessment, monitoring and staffing needs projection tools that can be used by LTC providers to improve feeding assistance care delivery and unintentional weight loss outcomes. The primary objective of this project is to train indigenous LTC staff how to (1) identify residents in need of feeding assistance, (2) effectively monitor daily care delivery; and, (3) utilize existing, non-nursing staff for some mealtime tasks to improve care.

Project Methods

A multiple baseline design will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in one federal and one state VA LTC facility. Research staff will collect baseline measures related to organizational characteristics, including staffing, nutritional care processes and resident outcomes including oral food and fluid intake and weight status. All LTC units in each of the two sites will be divided into two groups for program implementation purposes (for a total of 4 groups across the 2 sites) based on the proximity of a unit to other units, resident and staff characteristics. The program will be implemented with staff and residents on the units in the first site/group; while, the second site/group remain in usual care and continue to be monitored monthly for all care process and resident outcome measures. Research staff will train LTC staff in the implementation of program protocols during a 12-week intervention period. Research staff will then monitor LTC staff implementation of the program independent of research staff monthly following intervention to determine the sustainability of the program in the absence of research staff. All staff training and monitoring will be repeated for the units in groups three and four. This 3-year program evaluation study will determine the effectiveness and cost of translating efficacious research protocols into care practice to improve the nutritional status of LTC veterans.