

From Policy to Practice: Examining the Work Involved in Resident & Family Councils in Long-Term Residential Care



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Introduction

Resident and family councils are forums for residents and their family members to provide insights on enhancing the quality of care in long-term residential care (LTRC). These councils may help to promote residents' quality of life, but they also require work from residents and family members – work that remains largely invisible.

Objectives: We want to better understand the types of work involved in organizing and sustaining resident and family councils, and how this work is influenced by political structures governing care in Canada.

Methods

We conducted interviews at two LTRC homes in British Columbia and Manitoba, which consisted of:

- One resident/family council
- One resident council
- One family council

This poster reflects on data from semi-structured interviews with 12 residents and 12 family members. Interview data was coded thematically with a focus on various forms of invisible work¹.

Results

Resident and family council members participated in various, interrelated forms of unpaid and **invisible work**² within resident and family councils, which required persistence and skill:

- **Administrative work**³: Preparing the agenda, facilitating meetings, defining council's purpose, recruiting and retaining members, managing the time commitment, navigating organizational structures and hierarchies
- **Advocacy work**: Negotiating with management, raising issues, following-up on outstanding issues, monitoring progress, actively listening, asserting residents' rights, identifying and proposing solutions, articulating personal opinions and collective concerns
- **Emotion work**⁴: Regulating one's emotions, witnessing and enduring conflict in meetings, addressing tensions between residents, family and staff/management, managing disappointment and frustration, responding to the needs of others, anticipating how a concern will be received, deciding whether to raise a concern or not

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“Well, I think there's a real value in having this resident, family council. But... you don't want it to be just like a venting session, but you want to have structure with defined goals... so there's a real purpose and contribution. Not only to the residents, but also to the whole establishment.”

- Marie, family member

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“And so, I went to the first meeting. I didn't like it, because I felt the chair was hogging the meeting. And I decided I wasn't going to go back. And then I thought, that's so stupid. Because if you want to make a change, you have to be on the council. So that's what made me do it.”

- Loretta, resident

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“When I joined their meetings... there was difficulty in managing the group because there was lots of emotion... having to witness conversation that was oftentimes disrespectful... really difficult to witness coming into this with fresh eyes.”

- Sara, family member

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Conclusion

- Participants value resident and family councils, but this unpaid, invisible work remains unacknowledged in provincial/territorial policies. This work needs to be brought to light to help enhance the quality of care in LTRC⁵
- This work extends beyond meetings, as residents and family members pursue initiatives to help enhance various aspects of care within LTRC
- The sustainability of this work is constrained by institutional regulations and limited financial resources, which model neoliberal principles⁶
- Resident and family councils often operate in isolation from councils in other LTRC homes and from the broader community, which reduces opportunities for shared collaboration and collective advocacy

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