

“PSWS ARE THE EYES AND EARS!” THE OPPORTUNITY FOR ENHANCED INTEGRATION OF STROKE CARE

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Brief Description of Research or Project: The Canadian Stroke Strategy Best Practice Recommendations (CSS-R) do not explicitly acknowledge Personal Support Workers' (PSW) role, although PSWs spend the most hours with stroke survivors and families upon hospital discharge. Saint Elizabeth, Red Cross and Red Cross Care Partners explored the PSWs' role in evidence-based stroke rehabilitation and community reintegration through a mixed methods descriptive study. Results revealed a lack of clarity around the PSW role, little formal documentation of many PSWs activities supporting stroke survivors, and potential additional contributions by PSWs to stroke rehabilitation. Key recommendations focus on enhanced integration of PSWs into interdisciplinary stroke teams. **Why is this research important to profile at the Research Day 2014?** Stroke is the leading cause of adult disability and the third leading cause of death in Canada.¹ More than 50,000 Canadians experience a stroke each year, with the incidence of stroke expected to rise. Once the acute phase of a stroke is managed, stroke survivors often find themselves on an unpredictable trajectory of recovery including multiple care transitions. This trajectory is impacted not only by the stroke's effects on their physical, mental, emotional and social functioning but by the types of and quality of care and services received across the continuum, from acute to self-management to rehabilitation to prevention. In Ontario, Personal Support Workers (PSWs) provide the majority of home care services and care in long term care facilities^[1] ², yet little is known about whether PSWs are contributing to – or could contribute to – evidence-based stroke rehabilitation and reintegration to support to stroke survivors and family caregivers. This exploratory research adds to the understanding of the PSWs' role in evidence based rehabilitation and community reintegration. While this study focused on home care, the framework for defining the PSW role in an integrated stroke team and the challenges and opportunities identified are believed to be applicable to long term care. Recommendations from this research focus on improving system integration through enhanced collaboration, communication and awareness and have policy, practice, training and research implications. [1] Ontario Home Care Association. Home Care In Ontario - Fact and Figures. Toronto: Ontario Home Care Association, 2013. 2. Health Professionals Regulatory Advisory Council, 2006