

WE NEED TO TALK! OPTIMIZING THE PSWS' ROLE IN LTC

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Purpose: The optimization of the role of personal support workers (PSWs) in long-term care (LTC) is largely dependent on effective information exchange and collaboration among healthcare team members.

Methods: We conducted an institutional ethnography to explore the organizational systems that influence resident-care information exchange between PSWs and the rest of the healthcare team. The data were derived from three LTC facilities and included 83 hours of participant observation, 42 in-depth interviews, and analysis of 64 documents.

Results: Practical access to institutional texts containing individualized care-related information (e.g., assessments, care plans, social histories, and progress notes) was found to be dependent on job classification. Regulated healthcare professionals (i.e., occupational therapists, physiotherapists, licensed practical nurses, and registered nurses) frequently accessed and used these texts to provide and receive information. The PSWs were noted to lack practical access to these texts and primarily received and shared information orally. Consequently, microsystems of care, based on these distinct information exchange formats, emerged. In all the facilities studied, the organizational systems mandated the written exchange of information and did not formally support an oral exchange. Thus, this informal information exchange was largely dependent on the quality of working relationships within and between the microsystems of care.

Implications: Formal systems should be implemented to support structured oral information exchange within and between the microsystems of care found in LTC (e.g., regularly scheduled team huddles led by PSWs) to promote effectual exchange of information relevant to residents' care and thus the optimization of the role of the PSWs.