

## Policy Topics

### Understanding Older People with Cognitive Changes: a Canadian Perspective<sup>1</sup>

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1. OVERVIEW of the Canadian Health Care system, and Long-term care and community care and services in the province of Ontario.

In Ontario, there are regional Ontario government offices of the Coordinated Care Access Centres, with the mandate of offering both a range of required services in the community for people in need, and also providing equitable access to nursing home placement. The CCAC's maintain waiting lists to all nursing homes, people are registered chronologically, and are able to designate three choices. Ontario also allows for elders to select ethnically-specific nursing homes. There is a Japanese Nursing home in the greater Toronto area, and in fact, I hope to visit there soon. Home Care services are contracted out to many agencies. There is discussion in the Ontario Parliament, as well as at the Federal government level, to having a Federal Home Care program for all elder residents in need of such care. There have been many Position papers on this important topic.

2. BAYCREST Centre, Toronto, Ontario. I have worked there for over 25 years as a Senior Social Worker, and the Centre has grown to encompass a wide range of community and

outreach services, residential services such as a nursing home and supportive housing complex, a chronic care hospital and several short term assessment and rehabilitation units.

Integrating care, research and education is part of our strategic mission.

Baycrest is comprised of:

Geriatric Health Care System

Research Centre for Aging and the Brain

Centre for Education on Aging

Baycrest Foundation

3. APOTEX, Jewish Home for the Aged, a 472 bed nursing home on the Baycrest campus. Several photographs illustrate the physical and social environment. Over two-thirds of the residents living in the Apotex have some form of cognitive changes, and require a range of supports, services and emotional reassurance to have purposeful and meaningful experiences.

Residents in the nursing home who have a range of physical, cognitive, and social losses, continue to need useful roles and meaningful relationships. They need to feel connected to others in their social world, and have their sense of self-worth validated. The challenge is to support all their remaining strengths and capacities, while being mindful and compensating for their losses.

4. FILM making. An emotionally powerful two hour documentary was filmed, by Allan King, over a four month period at Baycrest, from fall of 2004 through winter, 2005. The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in Sept. 2005, to critical acclaim. It captured the emotional landscape, thoughts and feelings of eight remarkable residents, as they talk about what is important to them. A brief segment of the film was shown in class, and students responded to the concerns and feelings expressed by the residents. MEMORY,

<sup>1</sup> 本稿は、2006年4月25日に行われた総合政策学部講演会における講演内容の概要を、筆者自身がまとめたものである。講演時のテーマは「カナダにおける高齢者福祉：認知症理解啓発実践例から」であった。

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## R. Goodman, Understanding Older People with Cognitive Changes: a Canadian Perspective

for Max, Claire, Ida and company, has now been released in DVD format, and it includes a Health Care track, which features myself, and two psychologists, who share our observations as the scenes in the film unfold. The film is an excellent teaching tool, and can be used in in-service educationals for multi-disciplinary staff.

5. VISITING with elders: Strategies to help you have a meaningful and rich visit with an elderly loved one. A new guidebook which I authored, is both an online resource on the Baycrest website, [www.baycrest.org](http://www.baycrest.org) and available in hard copy for purchase. In the lecture, I reviewed some of the essential themes in the book and the educational goals of sharing this perspective with the larger public. The goals were to enlarge people's understanding of the social and emotional impact of cognitive changes, to provide strategies to help families/friends have meaningful visits, and to reduce the stigma and misinformation regarding dementia.

The purpose of the handbook is to encourage meaningful experiences for older people and their visitors and caregivers, to provide opportunities for emotional connectedness, to maintain and validate the person's sense of self, and to continue to include the older person in family and community networks.

The visiting book emphasizes the importance of understanding cognitive changes and the centrality of the older person's social relationships. Ways of communicating and being together are highlighted.

Being together and sharing stories and events is the foundation of our relationships. What is important to remember is that the older person continues to have a perspective, a way of understanding what is going on around them. We need to try and understand their "preferred

viewpoint," how they are experiencing their world, to figure out the best way of communicating with them. Communication is always possible, but in different ways, and often in non-verbal ways. Giving a massage or listening to music, or going for a walk together, are all supportive ways of being together.

Older people experiencing cognitive changes continue to respond to their social surroundings, and experience everything "in the moment". These are all important moments. They continue to have a range of feelings, just like you and I, and so it is important to validate their feelings. In this way, they know you are listening to them and understand.