

Caregivers as Primary Stakeholders in Recovery

Written by: Peter Ostrowski

We see them before the illness, we see them during the treatment and we continue to be caregivers upon the discharge from the hospital.

Who are we and what is the role of a caregiver in the life of a mental health patient? How significant are the communications between caregivers and the patient, the hospital staff, the doctors, the nurses and social workers?

In the eyes of the patient we are second in command, we are the senior VPs, we hold the patient's history deep in our heart and the patient is dear and essential to our existence. Would you agree with that?

Dear fellow caregivers, you know how dear our loved ones are to us when we notice the onset of mental illness in their life. Once confirmed we are in-step with new developments, we provide the patient's history to a family doctor or in an emergency just before the first referral to a mental health specialist.

We answer questions related to prior events, past family history and current challenges facing those under our care. There might be more than one caregiver. It could be a few members of the immediate family. However, there is typically one person who is closest to the patient being admitted to the hospital. So how can we be of help and enable the most effective entry into the mental health world?

Ideally, we will be included in the admission if consent is given and proper-

ly administered. Often the patient will say no to a caregiver having access to a medical file and the entire process just because there is a tiny piece of information that they wish not be open to others. Let's make sure that if there are barriers to a caregiver receiving full consent to access the medical file that it is well understood and communicated to all involved. All too often the consent is withdrawn because the patient does not know that partial or selective consent is possible. It is all or nothing and nothing means closed doors to caregiver participation in the patient's recovery. The consent should also be revisited over time as the circumstances may change and the patient's insight into their illness improves. An open session of good communication between the patient, the caregiver, and the medical staff can unlock the door previously shut by mistake or by lack of understanding of what can or cannot be shared with the caregiver.

Having received the consent we are now ready to participate in the mental health forum to benefit the patient. In the extreme, we carry the keys to the current condition as we may know significant past events and the immediate triggers. All too often patients are not interviewed about significant events from the past and may hide them because they see them as disruptive and negative in nature. For example, there might have been a death in the family, passing of a close friend, bullying in school, or other significant events resulting in PTSD-like consequences.



Surprisingly the admission questions directed at the patient typically do not address issues which may remain under the invisible layer of routine concerns. How can we, the caregivers be part of the inner circle of information sharing? We need to inform the staff that we are available and willing to be present at the meetings with the doctors, nurses and social workers when the major decisions are made. We can stay in touch with them by phone, by writing letters or in person on admission and any consecutive visit to the hospital. "Become visible and present and you shall be included" should be one of the caregiver instructions posted in the admission department. Often times formal meetings are too short to address every concern. Writing a summary of past events and an accompanying request to have it included in the patient's file goes a long way towards sharing of essential information with the hospital staff.

All parties involved need to understand that the caregiver is a "moving safe" with the most treasured reposi-

tory of essential information about the patient. Instead, at times we are treated at best as an uninflated spare tire after the accident. How can we change that?

It is important to realize that the safe is full of gold, ready to be opened and converted into medical currency that can be openly traded for gainful future investment. The hospital staff should look at the caregiver as a repository of essential information not as burden to be ignored.

Regular visits and interaction with the patient during their hospital stay will result in a wealth of information available but not shared with the caregiver. We would like to be informed about the diagnosis and planned treatment. If we are to be recognized as primary stakeholders in the vital medical care received by our loved one, then we need to be included as part of the care team.

Apart from medical treatment there are other essential questions. When will the patient be permitted to leave the premises and go for a day pass? When can they spend the weekend at home? Planning for a day pass or a weekend visit at home should involve caregivers as they will wait at the door to receive the loved ones.

When is the next re-assessment or change of medication? Would the new medication have any side effects or impair the patient's judgment in any way? Is it likely that the situation will get worse before seeing a long term improvement? How can we assist with dialing-in the proper medication? How does our opinion and observation of our loved one enter the picture? The patient may be unable to

verbalize their thoughts and provide a meaningful input to medical staff. How often are the caregivers being asked for their opinion in the process of treatment and recovery? Does the hospital staff invite them to participate in their care?

Caregivers would like to be informed about the environment in which their loved ones spend most of their time. What facilities are available in the hospital? Is there an opportunity for exercise, continuation of one's education, reading books, music, painting or any other significant hobby? It is a well-documented fact that past interests may provide the key to successful future recovery.

Leaving home is a major disruption and only we know what is dear to them and what might be essential to their recovery. Perhaps familiar books from their childhood, a letter from a close friend or family member, a piece of clothing that brings good memories or a print of the favorite family pet's paw signed in mud on a clean sheet of paper. Any of these things could be priceless in the unfamiliar environment of a mental health facility.

Leaving the hospital and planning for the patient's discharge is another activity in which a caregiver can provide valuable input and continue to provide seamless care outside a medical facility. Is everything well taken care of? What about the medication? When is the next outpatient visit? Do we need supportive housing? What are the necessary ingredients for success in the immediate future? The caregiver should be a go-to person for planning the discharge. As primary stakeholders in recovery, we have a major stake in the success of dis-

charge. This needs to be acknowledged and trust built through appropriate and ongoing communication. Caregivers and family members have a lot to offer and should be encouraged to do provide their input on an ongoing basis.

Many professionals participate in the daily life of a mental health hospital, from admissions to discharge, from the front door receptionist to the security office, from the doctor's lounge to the nursing station, and they all try to provide the best possible care for our loved ones. Ontario Shores is one big family and being a caregiver is a privilege and a responsibility which can greatly improve the comfort of the hospital stay for those we care about the most! We are there before, during, and after each hospital stay, and remain a constant support for our loved one. If encouraged, our involvement will make a significant contribution to the success of the hospital stay and re-integration back into the community.

Message from the Chair

Hi Everyone!

Spring is in the air and the days are getting longer. I think it is fair to say that more daylight hours help to lift our spirits and give us more energy.

Over the past year we have connected with many new faces and hopefully we have managed to bring support and comfort through education, resources, information, and peer connecting.

Communication is so important when travelling the Recovery Journey, but many don't know where to turn or how to get help. Please spread the word in the community about the Family Resource Centre. There are many more families looking for help so please help us to help them. Remember that each of you must take care of yourself because your family needs you to remain healthy. Take the time to do what makes you happy!

Pat Hofsepien

Chair of Family Council

**Have a coffee,
connect and chat!**

**Also open Thursday Evenings from
6:30 P.M. to 8:00 P.M.**

Family Resource Centre

Building 7, Level 2

Current and Upcoming 2019 Family Programs

- ◆ Open Family Discussion Group continues to run Thursday evenings from 6:30-8:00 P.M. in the Family Resource Centre. No registration required.
- ◆ WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) for Caregivers runs from April 29 to June 24, 2019. Registration required.
- ◆ Family Education Series (presented in collaboration with Social Work Council and Family Council) will offer 6 Tuesday evening sessions with a different topic each week, starting May 14, 2019.
- ◆ Family Education Sessions hosted with Durham Mental Health Services (DMHS) and Canadian Mental Health Association Durham continue to run Thursday evenings 6:30-8:30 P.M. at DMHS Whitby Mall location (Thickson Road and Highway 2) until June. No registration required.
- ◆ Sashbear Foundation continues to run their Family Connections program at Ontario Shores from June 6-August 22, 2019. For more information and to register go to: <https://sashbear.org/en/family-connections/family-connections-2>

For more information as events are scheduled please check our [Events Calendar](#)

More detailed information, including registration details, will be sent out via email to the Family Resource Centre email distribution list. If you are not on our email distribution list and would like to receive information about events, education and/or support groups for family members/caregivers, please contact the Family Resource Centre at (905) 430-4055 ext. 6970 or email familyresourcecentre@ontarioshores.ca

Enjoy Your Food

Written by: Joanna Ramsay, Clinical Dietitian, Metabolic & Weight Management Clinic , Ontario Shores

One of the recommendations of the new Canada's Food Guide is to *Enjoy Your Food*. This may sound like an obvious statement, however, there is so much more to enjoying food than just the taste. Enjoying your food also includes tasting the different flavours, creating a positive eating environment, and having an openness to try new foods. Enjoying food doesn't just involve sitting down and eating, it also involves planning meals and grocery shopping, preparing food, growing a vegetable garden, socializing during meals and involving others in all of these steps whenever possible.

The eating environment also has an impact on how much you enjoy your meals. An eating environment includes where you eat, who you eat with, how distracted you are while eating and what you are doing while you eat. Take time to reflect on your eating environment throughout the day to see if your eating environment helps to enhance your meal enjoyment or hinders your meal experience. Do you eat mindlessly in front of the TV? Do you eat while working instead of taking a break to enjoy some sunshine or social time while eating? Do you sit down to eat meals as a family or with friends or roommates, or does everybody fend for themselves and eat separate meals?

You can enhance your meal experiences by taking into consideration your personal taste, food budget and lifestyle while trying different cultural food choices and traditions. In different cultures, food and food traditions can bring people together and food is often a focal point of celebrations around the world. Some ways to explore cultural foods and food traditions include:

- Attend a cultural food event or cultural food festival
- Try new recipes from different cultures around the world
- Try shopping in a supermarket that specializes in various cultural foods
- Preserve and share your family's food traditions and recipes and pass them on to the next generation
- Talk to others about where different foods originate from
- Host a potluck where everybody brings a dish from different cultures, or everybody brings a traditional dish from their own personal background
- Celebrate holidays and special occasions using cultural food traditions

There are so many ways to *Enjoy Your Food*! Choose the ways that can best help you to enjoy your food experience even more. Here is a healthy recipe with a cultural spin on pasta salad to help you get started!

Curry Chickpea Pasta Salad

Preparation Time: 20 min Cooking Time: 10 min

Ingredients

10 oz whole wheat fusilli, small shells or other small pasta 300 g
1 Tbsp olive oil 15 mL
1 large clove garlic, minced 1
1 to 1 1/2 tsp curry powder 5 to 7 mL
1/2 tsp salt 2 mL
1/4 tsp pepper 1 mL
1 1/2 cup plain yogurt 375 mL
1 tsp grated zest of 1 lime 5 mL
2 Tbsp freshly squeezed lime juice, divided 30 mL
1 1/2 cup drained rinsed cooked or canned chickpeas 375 mL
1 apple, chopped 1
1 small sweet red pepper, chopped 1
1/4 English cucumber, chopped 1/4
1/4 cup raisins 60 mL

This salad is delicious when served right away, but also improves upon sitting. If making a day ahead, the dressing will soak into the pasta so you may want to add more yogurt and lime juice to moisten just before serving.

Instructions

Step 1

In a large pot of boiling water, cook pasta for about 8 minutes or according to package directions, until tender but firm. Drain and rinse under cold water. Drain well.

Step 2

In a small skillet or saucepan, heat oil over medium-low heat; sauté garlic for 1 minute or until softened and fragrant. Stir in curry powder; remove from heat and let cool.

Step 3

In a large bowl, whisk together salt, pepper, yogurt, lime zest and 1 tbsp (15 mL) of the lime juice. Scrape curry mixture into bowl and whisk to combine.

Step 4

Add pasta, chickpeas, apple, red pepper, cucumber and raisins to yogurt mixture and toss gently to coat. Taste and add more lime juice, as desired. Serve immediately, or cover and refrigerate for up to 1 day.

Recipe is from www.cookspiration.com.



What to Say to a Family Member Struggling With Mental Illness

Written by: J.S. (an Ontario Shores patient)

Finding the right words to help a family member with mental illness is important for recovery, wellness, and family unity. Often we must be grounded in love, harmony, unity and empathy.

Here are a few suggestions to advise a young family member struggling with mental illness:

1. Remind them that they will get well.
2. Offer them a simple task to do for themselves.
3. Encourage them to communicate with their doctor, nurse, or social worker.
4. Encourage them to manage their symptoms well.
5. Refer them to a loved one or significant other.
6. Suggest wellness strategies for the ill family member.
7. Invite them to a meal or family event.

The above ideas are guidelines only. There is no substitute for saying “job well done” to your ill family member. Please encourage them in their journey of wellness.



Recovery 101— Open to Family Caregivers

Spring Issue May, 2019

From the Ontario Shores Recovery College Course Guide 2019

This course brings patients, families, and staff of Ontario Shores together in order to learn more about recovery. By getting creative using Peace-Love (expressive arts), we will discuss and explore the CHIME Framework, while more importantly, learning that recovery is possible for everyone.

The course teaches participants:

- To understand the difference between Clinical Recovery and Personal Recovery
- To understand that recovery is an individual process
- How to support others in regaining control of their paths to wellness using the CHIME Framework (Connection, Hope, Identity, Meaning, Empowerment).

Date:
(Please choose one)

- May 13, 2019 **OR**
- May 27, 2019 **OR**
- June 10, 2019 **OR**
- June 24, 2019 **OR**
- July 8, 2019 **OR**
- July 29, 2019

Location: Conference Room D&E, The Conference Place, Building 5, Level 2

Start / End Time: 1:00 P.M. - 3:30 P.M.

****If you are interested in registering for this workshop, please contact Erica Francis, ext. 6309****

How can I access the Family Resource Centre?

Online: https://www.ontarioshores.ca/patients_families/family_and_caregiver_resources/family_resource_centre/

In Person:

Building 7, Level 2
700 Gordon Street
Whitby, ON L1N 5S9

Hours:

Monday to Friday
9:00 A.M.-4:30 P.M.

Thursday Evenings

6:30PM-8:00PM

(Closed 12:00 P.M.-1:00 P.M.)

By Phone:

905.430.4055 ext. 6970
1.800.341.6323 ext. 6970

By Email:

familyresourcecentre@ontarioshores.ca

Links Corner

Sharing Your Feedback

Do you have feedback to share about your experience at Ontario Shores ? Please contact Patient Experience at 905-430-4055 ext. 6703 or visit Building 3 Level 1. Our email address is PatientExperience@ontarioshores.ca.

Big White Wall

is an online mental health and well-being service offering self-help programs, creative outlets and a community that cares. Go to: www.bigwhitewall.ca.

Bounce Back

is a free skill-building program designed to help adults and youth 15+ manage symptoms of depression and anxiety. Go to: <http://www.bouncebackontario.ca>

Ontario Shores Website

Learn about events taking place at Ontario Shores this summer, listen to positive stories about the recovery journey from patients, families, staff members and volunteers, discover other facts and information about mental illness, and much more!