



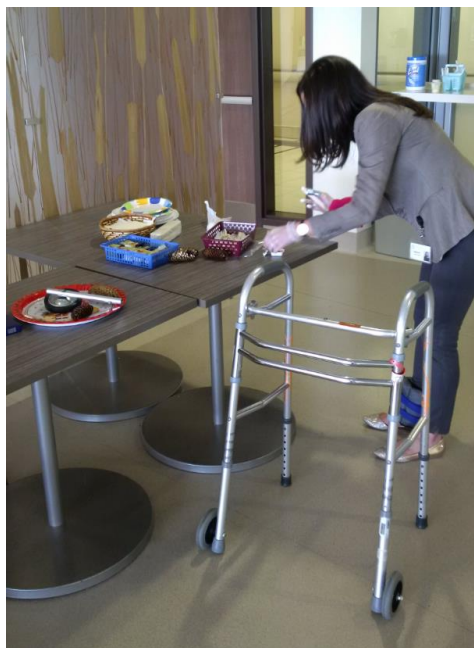
Walking in the shoes of a person with dementia through an aging and dementia simulation

On June 20th, 2016, staff at the St. Catharines Site of the Niagara Health System took part in an aging and dementia simulation. The event was hosted by staff and volunteers from the Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region, Stephanie MacKenzie, BSO Clinical Leader for the Niagara Health System, and clinicians from the St. Catharines Site.

Thirty-two people took part in the simulation. Volunteers helped participants modify their senses to experience the world in a similar way as an older adult with some health conditions. These modifications included:

- Popcorn kernels placed in the shoes to feel like neuropathic or nerve pain
- Goggles with the lenses obscured to replicate glaucoma
- Weights worn on the dominant arm and leg to produce weakness similar to a stroke
- Gloves with popcorn kernels, cotton balls, and a rigid stick inserted in the fingers to simulate nerve damage and arthritis

Participants then walked to a new environment and were asked to complete some simple tasks, such as folding clothing and counting change.



A staff member from the Niagara Health System tries to make a snack during an aging and dementia simulation.

Participants in the simulation reported feeling “helpless”, “lonely”, and “frustrated” throughout the experience.

Many people reacted to the tasks by rummaging through items, talking to themselves, becoming agitated, and refusing to use assistive devices. These reactions are often described as responsive behaviours*.

Participants agreed that the experience created a greater understanding of what patients experience, and why they may behave the way they do.

HNHB BSO Models

Single point of contact for individuals and caregivers to connect with multiple resources and services

An approach to support individuals and caregivers by taking a lead role in coordinating programs and services across multiple organizations

Mobile outreach teams to support individuals and caregivers in the community when in crisis

Mobile outreach teams to support individuals in long-term care and their caregivers

Clinical Leaders to support patients in hospitals, and the staff who work with them every day

Toolkit for primary care providers to help them assess and manage patients with responsive behaviours

* What are Responsive Behaviours?

- It is any behaviour that is in response to a real or perceived stimulus and may result in increased risk for the client or others.
- The behaviour may present a challenge to receiving appropriate interventions or co-existing with others.
- Responsive refers to the fact that many of these behaviours could respond to appropriate and timely interventions, and may be occurring as a result of an unmet need or desire that can no longer be communicated.
- Include pacing, wandering, repetition, verbal outburst, and physical outburst toward oneself or others.

Here's what staff at the St. Catharines Site had to say about the aging and dementia simulation...

"I felt helpless. I just wanted to give up on the tasks"

"The experience has definitely changed how I will interact with the residents I work with daily. What an AWESOME experience!!!"

"The cataract glasses were so difficult to deal with and combined with the pain in my feet, it was very hard to even concentrate on anything"

"It helped me understand more about my parents' daily experience (they both have dementia). I will definitely be more patient with them"

"I was surprised by how difficult it was to perform basic tasks and understand basic instructions, even though I don't have a cognitive impairment my patience was tested and I was frustrated. Eye-opening experience!"

"Excellent! Everyone should try this! Very enlightening"

What does research tell us about the aging and dementia simulation?

The experiences of staff at the St. Catharines Site are not unique.

Beville (2002) completed an experiential learning exercise known as the Virtual Dementia Tour® with 146 people working with older adults. The majority of participants exhibited at least one responsive behaviour during the 10-minute exercise, such as wandering, rummaging through objects, not participating in tasks, or demonstrating repetitive behaviours.

These types of experiences "can help to foster empathy, nurture understanding, and shape more appropriate caregiver responses to difficult situations. When understanding and empathy improve, families are satisfied, and residents are happy" (p. 190).

Reference: Beville, P.K. (2002). Virtual Dementia Tour® helps sensitize health care providers. *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias*, 17, 183-190.

See these articles from local news outlets to read more about the aging and dementia simulation:

St. Catharines Standard:

<http://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/2016/06/20/simulation-lets-participants-experience-old-age>

Niagara This Week:

<http://www.niagarathisweek.com/community-story/6731915-alzheimer-s-society-nhs-team-up-for-aging-and-dementia-simulation/>

Contact your local Alzheimer Society to learn how your organization can host an aging and dementia simulation

Learn More About Behavioural Supports Ontario in Our Region: [BSO in HNHB LHIN](#)