

Butterfly Indicator *Communication Tool*

Quality Palliative Care in Long
Term Care Alliance (QPC-LTC)



Acknowledgements

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Please copy and share this document. We would appreciate you referencing the source of this work as

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Introduction

During a palliative care retreat held with staff from two long term care homes, participants indicated that there were no formal processes in place to effectively communicate a resident's death to staff in all departments. Participants stated it was important to know that a resident had died when working on that floor or unit. The idea of using a symbol as subtle indicator to inform staff was suggested. The Butterfly indicator was subsequently adopted by the Palliative Care Resource Teams at Bethammi Nursing Home and Hogarth Riverview Manor from the Hospice/Palliative Care Program at St. Joseph's Hospital. A butterfly indicator is a quick and effective way to inform staff and others that someone in the room has died. It is an immediate action that can offer notification to staff in the event of a death and it alerts staff from all departments working in the area.

Key Partners



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Data Indicator Sheet

Quality Palliative Care in Long Term Care A Community-University Research Alliance

Butterfly Indicator Data Sheet

The butterflies will be used to help inform all staff of a resident's death. Staff will place a butterfly high on the door frame of the room of a resident who has died. The data collected below will indicate if the butterfly initiative is being applied.

Date Posted	Name of person posting butterfly	Position of person posting butterfly	Room # of resident	When was the butterfly removed

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Supporting Communication

Utilizing a Butterfly Indicator is a method of communicating a resident's death to staff, volunteers, residents, and family members.

Consider the following techniques in your home:

-  placing the butterfly on the door of a deceased resident can prepare staff and volunteers prior to entering the room
-  putting a butterfly on the resident's chart can help nursing staff identify who has a palliative or end-of-life care plan
-  Palliative care team members can identify themselves by placing a butterfly indicator (ie pin) on their uniform
-  encouraging palliative care team members to have a butterfly beside their name on the shift rotation boards allows for staff, residents, and families to easily identify who is on the palliative care resource team
-  Placing a butterfly at the place setting in the dining room of a resident who has died communicates that resident's death to other residents and families

Tips for Success

-  Education on the use of the butterfly as a communication tool is important to inform staff of its meaning and to ensure the tool is used effectively (see butterfly education handout)
-  Make sure the butterfly is large enough to catch the attention of staff, residents, families and volunteers
-  Consider the colour of the butterfly—this is also important for not only visibility but cohesiveness within your palliative care program
-  Post a butterfly indicator protocol at a location in the home areas to ensure that staff know:
 - How to know when a butterfly indicator should be implemented?
 - Who should implement the butterfly?
 - When is the butterfly removed ?
 - What documentation should go along with the butterfly indicator?



Sample Protocol—Resident's Door

Purpose

A butterfly indicator is a subtle way to alert staff prior to entering a resident's room that a death has occurred. It is an immediate action that can provides notification to staff in the event of a death as not all departments can be informed at the time.

Process

