
The changing face of dementia

Lakehead researchers shine at International Alzheimer's Conference

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News Editor

Recently, two professors at Lakehead University were selected to serve as keynote speakers for the 26th annual International Alzheimer's Conference. In addition to this honour, Dr. Mary Lou Kelley from the school of Social Work and Dr. Elaine Wiersma from the Masters in Public Health program will be featured in a short "thought leadership" film, to be viewed during the event.

Organized by Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) and the Alzheimer Society of Canada, this year's conference will take place in Toronto at the end of March. The event will feature a variety of sessions for the large number of healthcare professionals, researchers, and Alzheimer's associations in attendance. Individuals living with dementia and their families will also be present.

The involvement of dedicated and innovative researchers like Wiersma and Kelley will contribute to a better understanding of the needs of people living with Alzheimer's and the strategies to support them and their families. Their film, which has strong ties to this year's theme "the changing face of dementia," will also benefit the conference and its many participants.

"The goal of the film is to feature leading-edge research... based at the Centre for Education and Research on Aging and Health (CERAH) at Lakehead and is conducted in partnership with St. Joseph's Care Group,"

says Kelley. "By making this film, we hoped to profile the excellent research at CERAH and the excellent clinical programs for people with dementia at St. Joseph's."

The film featured two projects. One, led by Wiersma, strives to better comprehend how individuals with early-stage Alzheimer's "self manage." This refers to the development of certain preventative and supportive strategies that allow those with Alzheimer's to retain their independence and continue to live and participate in their community.

The other project, led by Kelley, focuses on improving the quality of life for people who are dying in long term-care homes.

"Initial stages of [our] research demonstrated that staff lack confidence and knowledge in caring for people at the end of life, and that there is a need for enhanced clinical practices like palliative care assessment and staff education," Kelley explains. "To respond to these needs, we are working with the staff to develop a formal palliative care team and program. This palliative care team will be a demonstration project; the results will be shared with long term care homes nationally."

Kelley also emphasizes that both projects use a research methodology called "participatory research," which means that people with Alzheimer's, their families, and the staff at long-term care homes are all working with the research team as "co-researchers."

"So, it is not research on or about them, but with them," explains Dr. Kelley. "Our goal is to create social change, not only generate new knowledge."

For more information on Kelley's research on "Quality Palliative Care in Long-Term Care," visit the project website at palliativealliance.ca. Further information on the 2011 International Alzheimer's Conference can be found at www.adi2011.org.
