

Research Study Volunteer navigation partnerships: A compassionate community approach to care

Researchers from the University of British Columbia and the University of Alberta have developed an evidence-based intervention designed to improve the quality of life of older adults living at home with serious illness. The program, called Nav-CARE, uses trained peer navigators to help older adults (55+) aging with complex illnesses maintain their independence and stay connected to their community. As their health declines, individuals experience significant challenges meeting their needs related to nutrition, transportation, activities of daily living, accessing information, making good decisions, and social support. Those who fail to receive adequate assistance meeting these needs are at high risk for social isolation, disengagement from community, and poor quality of life.

Nav-CARE takes experienced volunteers and provides them with additional training to help older adults living with complex illness make connections with supportive networks and services in their community. These peer volunteers visit client's homes and work one on one over an extended period of time using a "neighbours helping neighbours" approach. Together, volunteers and clients identify and solve a variety of practical problems that supports the client to live well even as their

health declines. Volunteers receive ongoing education, support and mentorship as part of their engagement in the Nav-CARE research project.

Nav-CARE is an evidence-based program currently being scaled out for further evaluation. Competencies for the peer volunteers were constructed by an international group of experts in seniors' care. The concept was tested in a one-year pilot, has been implemented and evaluated in 10 communities across Canada, and is now being scaled out to 14 additional sites across 7 provinces. Evaluation of the intervention indicates that Nav-CARE has a positive impact on volunteers, clients, and their families. Clients cite the benefits of having a consistent source of social support who knows how to help them overcome the challenges they face. They also report feeling more engaged with life and their communities, more confident of the decisions they make, and more aware of the resources available to help them. In the words of one client, having a peer navigator simply "made life more livable."

If you are aged 55+ and feel you would benefit from this program contact the Salmon Arm Nav-CARE coordinator at 250-832-7099, admin@shuswaphospice.ca or website www.shuswaphospice.ca.



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