



Shirley Lee, Family Council Volunteer with VCAFC Review of:

Alzheimer Society of B.C. | Online “Research Connects” Webinar (April 2024 | 63 mins)

Topic: [Exploring Resident & Family Councils in Long-Term Care](#)
[Alzheimer’s Society Long-Term Care webinars](#)

Speaker: Dr. Sheila Novek, Post-Doctoral Fellow, UBC School of Nursing

Guest Speaker *Dr. Sheila Novek, post-doctoral fellow at the UBC School of Nursing, shares how resident and family councils work and their role in decision-making processes within the care home. [Dr. Novek presents findings from a recent study](#), highlighting the lived experiences of residents, families and staff who engage with resident and family council, including the challenges they encounter and promising practices that support meaningful engagement and advocacy.”*

Summary

[Family and resident councils](#) serve as an essential platform for improving the quality of life within LTC homes. They allow families to collaborate with staff, raise concerns, and suggest improvements to the care environment. However, to maintain their effectiveness, these councils require stronger organizational support, clear communication structures, and increased visibility within the facility. By addressing these areas, the councils can amplify their impact and drive meaningful change that benefits both residents and their families.

Key Findings

1. What Are Resident & Family Councils?

- **Definition:** Groups of residents and/or family members who meet regularly to discuss concerns, provide input to management, and advocate for improvements in long-term care (LTC) homes.
- **Roles:**
 - Address daily life issues and policy changes.
 - Offer peer support and education.
 - Provide feedback to management on care quality.
 - Engage in fundraising and advocacy.

2. Study Overview

- **Objective:** To understand how resident and family councils function in practice and identify promising approaches for meaningful engagement.
- **Methodology:**
 - Conducted in-depth research at a non-profit LTC home in Vancouver.
 - 12 meetings observed (6 resident council & 6 family council).
 - Interviews with residents, families, staff, and key informants.

3. Key Issues Addressed by Councils

- **Resident Councils Focused On:**
 - Daily living concerns (e.g., food quality, accessibility, recreation).
 - Physical improvements (e.g., repaving patios for accessibility).
 - Council procedures (e.g., elections, meeting structures).
- **Family Councils Focused On:**
 - Policies and protocols (e.g., admissions process, staff communication).
 - Quality improvement initiatives (e.g., end-of-life care, resident transfers).
 - Staff retention and overall care practices.

4. Challenges & Barriers

- **Engagement & Representation:**
 - Residents sometimes struggled to voice concerns or felt unheard.
 - Some residents unaware of their rights or the purpose of the council.
 - Family members often better at framing issues as collective concerns.
- **Communication with Management:**
 - Family councils benefited from structured communication processes.
 - Resident councils had less formalized feedback loops, leading to frustration.
- **Organizational Support:**
 - Leadership buy-in was critical for councils to effect change.
 - Staff tasked with council support were often overburdened.
 - New LTC regulations strengthened councils' role but lacked dedicated resources.

5. Promising Practices & Recommendations

- **Structured Communication:**
 - Establishing clear reporting channels with senior management improves effectiveness.
 - **Resident Empowerment:**
 - Training and resources needed to help residents participate effectively.
 - Accessible, printed materials should be available for residents with impairments.
 - **Visibility & Recognition:**
 - Councils should be publicly recognized (e.g., on LTC home websites).
 - Successes should be shared to encourage engagement and networking.
 - **Advocacy Beyond Individual Homes:**
 - Councils can connect with regional and external organizations for broader systemic change.
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Shirley posed a Question to ChatGBT (Just for fun!)
Here is the questions and its response:

How could these findings be used for setting up a new family council in a long-term care facility?

These findings provide valuable insights for setting up a new family council in a long-term care (LTC) facility. Below is a step-by-step guide based on the research findings to ensure a successful and effective council:

1. Establish a Strong Foundation

Key Finding: Councils that have clear structures and communication channels with management are more effective.

✓ **Action Steps:**

- Gather Interested Families: Reach out to family members of residents through meetings, newsletters, and staff communication.
- Define a Mission & Goals: Decide whether the council will focus on advocacy, education, support, or a mix of all three.
- Establish a Leadership Team: Elect a chairperson and other key roles to organize meetings and serve as the point of contact with management.
- Create Council Guidelines: Draft a document outlining membership rules, meeting schedules, decision-making processes, and responsibilities.

2. Build Effective Communication Channels

Key Finding: Councils that have a formal communication process with LTC management achieve more meaningful change.

✓ **Action Steps:**

- Schedule Regular Meetings with Senior Leadership: Request a dedicated liaison from the LTC facility (e.g., administrator, care director) who will attend meetings on request and respond to concerns.
- Use a Structured Feedback System: Ensure family concerns are formally logged, followed up on, and addressed by management. Consider using a concern tracker to track issues and responses.
- Encourage Transparency: Post meeting minutes in public areas or online so all families can stay informed.

3. Address Meaningful Issues

Key Finding: Family councils are most successful when they focus on policy-level concerns rather than individual complaints.

✓ **Action Steps:**

- Identify Key Priorities: Common concerns include staffing levels, communication policies, resident care practices, and facility improvements.
- Develop Policy Proposals: Instead of just raising issues, suggest solutions to management (e.g., "We propose a clearer end-of-life care communication guide for families").
- Collaborate with Resident Councils: If a resident council exists, coordinate efforts to ensure alignment and stronger advocacy.

4. Ensure Inclusion & Engagement

Key Finding: Councils work best when all family members feel welcome and encouraged to participate.

✓ Action Steps:

- *Offer Different Participation Levels:* Not all family members can attend every meeting. Provide options such as email updates, virtual meetings, or anonymous feedback forms.
- *Make Meetings Accessible:* Schedule meetings at convenient times and offer hybrid options (in-person & online).
- *Educate & Empower Families:* Provide training on residents' rights, LTC policies, and effective advocacy strategies.

5. Gain Organizational & External Support

Key Finding: Councils thrive when supported by LTC leadership and external networks.

✓ Action Steps:

- *Ensure Leadership Buy-In:* The LTC facility must recognize the council as a valuable partner, not an adversary. Engage leadership early and emphasize collaboration.
- *Seek External Resources:* Connect with organizations like the Long-Term Care Councils Association of BC or similar advocacy groups to access training, best practices, and legal support.
- *Celebrate Successes:* Publicly recognize achievements (e.g., policy changes, facility improvements) to boost morale and visibility.

Final Thoughts

By following these steps, a new family council can be structured for long-term success, ensuring that family voices are heard, and meaningful changes are made in the LTC facility.