

Dementia Metamorphosis

A new model in long term care is transforming the way we take care of dementia patients



By Rhonda Kronyk

When you walk into the Angel Home wing of the Lifestyle Options Retirement Communities Whitemud, you immediately notice colorful walls and ceilings. A woman comes out of her room whistling, someone Jennifer Chan, Director of Care/Clinical Lead says never used to whistle. The Angel Home is part of a one-year pilot project between Alberta Health Services and Dementia Care Matters. The premise is that people retain their emotions even after they have lost their memories. By tapping into good emotions, Butterfly Homes allow dementia patients to be engaged in the good life.

Dementia Care Matters was founded by Dr. David Sheard. There are over 700 Butterfly Care Homes in the United Kingdom, Edmonton is the site of the first home in Canada. When Sheard was in medical training in the late 1970s, he says he saw too many "long faceless

corridors, total dehumanization, and people in distress clustered at the ward doors trying to get out." In the 1980s dementia care was moved into care homes but Sheard felt they "acted as a mask to the same dehumanizing approach." After 14 years in dementia care, Sheard quit. "I can't and won't run warehouses in dementia care anymore," he says.

Traditional care focuses on clinical processes. Sheard's Butterfly Homes are family units of 8-10 people with all "institution features that represent control removed," he says. Chan says that clinical care is always necessary, but that treating dementia is more effective when people's emotions are engaged. "When you are treated well," she says, "you feel good." Only a few weeks into the pilot, staff in the Angel Home already see a difference. "Patients feel safe with us," Chan says. When patients feel

safe, they sleep better and don't try to leave the ward. That reduces the need for safety restraints and medication. Residents are also encouraged to bring their memories with them. Staff are permitted to wear street clothes. Communal spaces are being reworked to feel more like a family home. In the garden, raised beds allow patients to do their own gardening.

This model takes people back to a time and place where they had a role and purpose in life, explains Dr. Sheard, "when they felt needed and loved and were busy and active." Patients do light household chores, cook snacks and garden. They eat in groups and develop relationships with each other. "They feel they are helping to run the place in their own way," Sheard says.

Renate Sainsbury, General Manager of Lifestyle Options, explains that Butterfly Homes focus on people's right of citizenship and quality of life "without sacrificing safety." As part of the pilot project, 10 elements of dementia care are being tracked including patient engagement, sleeping, medication, and staff sick time. "Like butterflies that transform and bring beauty, colour, and life, continuing care homes and their staff need to transform," Sheard says. "They too can create butterfly moments in dementia care where people living with a dementia come alive again in living in the moment."

