

Research Highlights

AN UPDATE FROM THE EDWARD AND ESTHER POLISHER RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF THE
MADLYN AND LEONARD ABRAMSON CENTER FOR JEWISH LIFE (FORMERLY PHILADELPHIA GERIATRIC CENTER)

Culture change makes care personal, not routine

Polisher researchers to evaluate program at New York nursing homes

Mrs. Green is an elderly resident in a long-term care facility. On a crisp fall morning, she prefers to stay in bed and watch the leaves changing color outside her window. But Nancy, the certified nursing assistant (CNA) in charge of Mrs. Green's care, wants her to get up and take a bath. If Nancy doesn't bathe her immediately, Nancy's schedule will be off for the day, and she will be reprimanded by her supervisor.

The culture of care in a nursing home reflects its priorities. Should Mrs. Green be able to choose how she wishes to spend her morning, or must Nancy keep to a rigid schedule that guarantees all residents in her care are bathed by lunch?

Three New York nursing homes have decided that Mrs. Green's decision to stay in bed will improve her quality of life more than a 10 a.m. bath. Through a creative, multifaceted training program, they will attempt to cause a culture change—a shift in the culture of care that emphasizes fostering a nurturing relationship between staff and residents rather than simply delivering care. The New York Chapter of the National Alzheimer's Association will be implementing this culture change and administering a grant from the New York State Department of Health to evaluate the outcome and sustainability of the change. The grant was awarded to the Polisher Research Institute.

Will Senders, coordinator of nursing home residential affairs for the Alzheimer's Association chapter, selected the Polisher Research Institute as the grant recipient after reading an article in "Alzheimer's



Care Quarterly" by Kimberly Van Haitsma, Ph.D., a psychologist and associate director of the Polisher Research Institute.

"As I read the article, I thought 'these people speak my language,'" recalls Mr. Senders. He adds that the reputation of the Institute and its longtime director, the late M. Powell Lawton, Ph.D., contributed to his decision.

Dr. Van Haitsma, principal investigator in the study, and her team will be looking at how various regulatory requirements help or hinder a nursing home in its ability to enact and sustain a culture change. In addition, they will analyze the impact of culture change interventions—actions that force changes in traditional methods of delivering care—on residents, staff, families, and the organization as a whole.

The success of the program is largely based on intangible elements, such as increased staff satisfaction. Interviews with staff, family and residents conducted by

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Environmental lexicon ready

Back to the future: new directions for the Polisher Research Institute

By Vicki A. Freedman, Ph.D.



Today, our research addresses how best to harness cutting-edge technologies, creative programs, and novel designs to maximize the quality of care and quality of life of the elderly community

Shortly after being appointed director, I asked the senior staff what brought them to the Polisher Research Institute and what keeps them here, some for as long as 40 years. The most consistent reply was: to conduct research that makes a difference in the lives of older people, particularly those who cannot care for themselves.

This view speaks directly to the mission of the Madlyn and Leonard Abramson Center for Jewish Life: to enhance the quality of life for older people by providing care of exceptional quality, strengthened by teaching and research. To support this mission, the Polisher Research Institute has assembled the next generation of gerontologists to launch innovative programs of research.

Today, our research addresses how best to harness cutting-edge technologies, creative programs, and novel designs to maximize the quality of care and quality of life of the elderly community. Complementing these applied initiatives, Polisher scientists also seek to understand the broader societal implications of the changing health and care needs of America's aging population.

In formulating these new directions, we have drawn upon our rich past. Gerontological research was born at Philadelphia Geriatric Center (PGC)—the former name of our parent agency. PGC pioneered many groundbreaking research endeavors, most notably the Weiss Institute, which housed the first nursing home designed especially for persons with Alzheimer's disease. Other significant research projects focused on aging issues in the local community and on key population trends. Most recently, its research has influenced the state-of-the-art design and environment of the Abramson Residence, the 324-bed residential-

style nursing facility at the Abramson Center for Jewish Life.

Why did research flourish here? At the core of much of this pioneering work was a humble and unassuming man, a teacher of great intellect, M. Powell Lawton, Ph.D. Indeed, Powell built the Institute—the first of its kind to be sponsored by a geriatric facility—from a one-person endeavor to a multidisciplinary department numbering 60 people at its height.

Key to this growth were two essential ingredients: a keen desire on the part of staff to improve the quality of care and of life for older people, and a supportive atmosphere for testing new ideas. Both features are salient in the Institute's new home, the Abramson Center for Jewish Life. And in this fertile environment, the Polisher Research Institute continues to thrive.

In the current issue, we highlight four of the many groundbreaking projects developed by our staff: a program of research aimed at sustaining changes in the culture of care provided in nursing homes; a model palliative care program for nursing homes; a newly developed tool to aid architects and planners in the design of nursing homes; and a study of the physiologic response of older frail people to the challenge of moving. These projects represent just a fraction of the exciting new endeavors being undertaken by our research staff.

It is my sincere hope that as we head into the future, the Polisher Research Institute will continue in its tradition of producing valuable and highly relevant knowledge that touches the lives of seniors. ■

Dr. Vicki A. Freedman is the newly appointed director of the Polisher Research Institute.

Caring for residents at the end of life

Researchers to study palliative care program

How can nursing homes best care for elderly residents who require comfort rather than cures? Researchers at the Polisher Research Institute will attempt to answer this question as they study a new Palliative Care Program starting this fall at the Abramson Center for Jewish Life.

The program is being developed by Nancy Hodgson, R.N., Ph.D. of the Center's Polisher Research Institute, with a team drawn from the Center's medical and nursing services, chaplaincy, psychology, social work, rehabilitation and activities staff as well as volunteers.

Dr. Hodgson, a former hospice nurse, explains that some residents who are suffering from terminal illnesses, such as cancer, are no longer seeking cures and do not want heroic measures used in the course of their care. Rather, they are looking for a way to have the highest quality of life possible during their last days. Rabbi Sandra Berliner, director of chaplaincy at the Abramson Center for Jewish Life and a palliative care team member, notes, "The word palliative is so



helpful because it doesn't imply a cure or a fix. It implies caring—the physical and emotional and spiritual aspects of caring."

Nursing homes, by state regulation, have protocols for end-of-life care; however, most do not have formal palliative care programs. "This project offers the unique opportunity to capture the multifaceted context in which a palliative care program is developed in the nursing home setting," says Dr. Neville Strumpf, Edith Clemmer Steinbright Professor

in Gerontology and Director at the Hartford Center of Geriatric Nursing Excellence at the University of Pennsylvania. The Hartford Center has awarded pilot funding to study the program.

The Center's Palliative Care Program is focused on caring for the whole person and includes:

- Pain management to reduce physical discomfort and suffering
- Holistic treatments, such as massage therapy, aromatherapy or music therapy, to promote physical comfort and a sense of well-being
- Spiritual and emotional counseling, based on Jewish values, to enhance peace of mind

Douglas R. Venzie, administrator of the Center's Abramson Residence, points out that all residents receive pain management as needed, pastoral care, and other services. The palliative care program will offer residents at the very end of life and their families a holistic approach to enhance their quality of life.

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Culture change makes care personal, not routine

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Anne Bower, Ph.D., a senior research scientist at the Institute, will form the nucleus of the evaluation of the culture change. Dr. Bower has been trained as an ethnographer—an objective observer who analyzes results based on interviews with participants.

The culture change will focus on enhanced training for CNAs. The training program includes basic information about dementia, how to communicate with those unable to communicate, stress management, end-of-life care and building partnerships with family members in caregiving. In a novel twist, nursing home residents in early stages of

Alzheimer's disease will teach portions of the training program directly to the staff. According to Dr. Van Haitsma, this connection with residents suffering from Alzheimer's who are still active and somewhat alert is intended to develop empathy between the CNAs and residents with dementia.

Participants will visit nursing homes that have already implemented a culture change, so they can observe how such a change improves the quality of care. Further, the Alzheimer's Association trainers—professional social workers—will model nurturing behavior for CNAs with residents they care for on a daily basis. By observing the desired

behavior with familiar residents, CNAs will be able to more easily embrace new ways of providing care, according to Dr. Van Haitsma.

Peer support groups will be used to sustain the new culture of care over time. The peer support will be fostered within each facility and across the three facilities in the program, and will enable staff members to share their experiences and solve problems involved in the culture change.

Once the research team has analyzed the success of the program, they will attempt to design a model for culture change that can be used by any nursing home that seeks a new culture of care. ■

New and noteworthy

The following presentations will be made by the Polisher Research Institute staff at the 2002 annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, to be held November 22-26 in Boston.

PRESENTATIONS

“Adrenocortical Activity and Cognition in Response to Nursing Home Relocation.” Vicki A. Freedman, Ph.D., Nancy Hodgson, R.N., Ph.D., Amy Behel, Douglas Granger, Ph.D.

“The Evaluation of Passive Technology Monitoring and Call Systems for Improving Quality of Life in Persons with Dementia.”

Kimberly J. Curyto, Ph.D., Kimberly Van Haitsma, Ph.D., Nancy Hodgson, R.N., Ph.D.

“The Impact of Assistive Technology on Caregiver Time and Burden.” Vicki A. Freedman, Ph.D., Kathleen Cagney, Ph.D., Emily Agree, Ph.D., Marc Cohen, Ph.D.,

Jessica Miller, Ph.D.

“Leadership: The Key to Culture Change in Long-Term Care.”

Susan Gilster, R.N. and Kimberly Van Haitsma, Ph.D.

“Perceiving the Dead: The Meaning and Value of Sensing Experiences for the Dying and Their Caregivers.”

Anne Bower, Ph.D. and JoAnne Reifsnyder, Ph.D., R.N., A.O.C.N.

“Questions I Now Ask: Faith in an Assisted Living Facility.”

Helen Black, Ph.D.

“Redefining Substitution: When do Assistive Devices Take the Place of Personal Care.”

Emily M. Agree, Ph.D., Vicki A. Freedman, Ph.D., Jennifer Cornman, Ph.D., Douglas A. Wolf, Ph.D., John E. Marcotte, Ph.D.

POSTERS

“Daily Activity and Quality of Life.” Christine Hoffman, Miriam S.

Moss, M.A., Jana Mossey, Ph.D., and Morton Kleban, Ph.D.

“Depression and Years of Desired Life.” Miriam S. Moss, M.A., Christine Hoffman, and Jana Mossey, Ph.D.

“The Effects of Caregiver Stress on Dimensions of Health.” Amy Behel, Tina B. Hong, Ph.D., Elia E. Femia, Ph.D., Mary Ann P. Stevens, Ph.D., and Steven H. Zarit, Ph.D.

SYMPOSIA

“Neuroendocrine Reactivity and Cognition in the Elderly,” Nancy Hodgson, R.N., Ph.D. (organizer)

“Bringing Technology Into the Nursing Home: Barriers and Opportunities.”

Kimberly Curyto, Ph.D. (organizer)

“Nursing home end-of-life care: Measuring quality and costs.” Miriam S. Moss, M.A. (discussant)

Saliva test measures stress levels in the elderly

Test used to study reactions to relocation

Moving to a new home is a stressful experience for most people, whether they are four or 84 years old. For the frail elderly relocating can be especially difficult.

That is why researchers at the Polisher Research Institute were surprised to find that residents who moved to the Abramson Center for Jewish Life from its former campus recovered from this normally stressful experience in a relatively short time.

“We thought it might take a few months for people to adjust,” explains Vicki Freedman, Ph.D., lead investigator. “What we found was within a few weeks, their cortisol levels returned to or fell below their pre-move levels.”

These preliminary findings are from the Institute’s study on stress and relocation funded by the National Institute on Aging with supplemental support from the Center and the

College of Health and Human Development and Population Research Institute at Pennsylvania State University. The study used saliva samples from the elderly residents taken before and after the move to measure the levels of stress as reflected by increased levels of the hormone cortisol.

“Penn State’s partnership with the Polisher Research Institute was a unique opportunity to support innovative interdisciplinary research that benefits elderly Pennsylvanians,” says Mark D. Hayward, Ph.D., director of the Social Science Research Institute at the Pennsylvania State University

“It also provided us with the opportunity to forge collaborative ties across institutions to push scientific boundaries. Many problems facing the elderly population are complex research issues requiring interdisciplinary teams blending

biomedical and social science knowledge.”

Residents also exhibited less sadness and less anxiety from the time they arrived in their new home, and these positive changes persisted to the end of the study, about four weeks following the relocation.

“Taken together,” Dr. Freedman adds, “these results suggest that relocating does not have to be a negative experience, but instead can be a positive challenge for frail seniors.”

The researchers will be presenting their results in November at the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association in Philadelphia. A follow-up presentation at the annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of America in Boston will examine linkages among cortisol, mood, and cognition in the frail elderly. ■

Environmental design lexicon will assist nursing home planners

If you've thought about modifying your home to accommodate an elderly loved one, there are books and web sites offering information on furnishings and design that may help you. However, until now, nursing home planners did not have the same resources available if they wanted to remodel or build a new facility and incorporate the most up-to-date, effective designs for the aged, particularly those with dementia.

Researchers at the Polisher Research Institute are helping to fill that void with the completion of an environmental design lexicon for dementia care funded by the National Alzheimer's Association. The project was initiated by the Institute's former director, the late M. Powell Lawton, Ph.D., a pioneer in the field of planning living spaces for people with Alzheimer's disease. An expert panel of consultants worked with the researchers on this project, which

involved an extensive literature review followed by a period of observation and interviews at six nursing homes.

According to Gerald D. Weisman, Ph.D., co-director of the Institute on Aging and Environment at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, "The Design Lexicon—Powell Lawton's final project prior to his tragic death—represents a significant advance in our ability to effectively link environment-aging research and design. The lexicon will provide planning and design guidance for the most critical decisions confronted in the planning and design of places for dementia care." Dr. Weisman is a member of the project's technical advisory panel.

Within the next six months, the completed lexicon should be available for distribution in a paper version. Designers will be able to look up spaces, objects, functions, systems, and user needs in the lexicon and see up-to-date comments about the

advantages and disadvantages of each.

According to Kimberly Van Haitzma, Ph.D., director of the Harry Stern Family Center for Innovations in Alzheimer's Care, the lexicon will direct planners to the best type of carpeting, chair or dresser for people with dementia. Once the planners identify the type of object they need, they can turn to their usual vendors to supply it.

The next step will be making a searchable version of the lexicon available on the Internet, which will be possible thanks to a grant from the Extendicare Foundation.

The Polisher Research Institute has also been awarded a contract from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to create a web-based searchable, updateable lexicon of existing and emerging technologies in long-term-care settings. ■



EDRA members tour Center

Frank Podietz, president and CEO of the Abramson Center for Jewish Life, and Vicki Freedman, Ph.D., director of the Center's Edward and Esther Polisher Research Institute (far right) welcomed Yeunsook Lee, Ph.D., and Susan Rodiek, Ph.D., members of the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) to the Center on May 22. EDRA included a tour of the Center as part of its 2002 conference in Philadelphia.

Library catalogue available online

The Polisher Research Institute library's catalog will soon be available online. The library contains 8,500 volumes and over 200 journals and pamphlets. It is one of the most extensive resources on gerontology and aging in the United States.

To search the catalogue, visit our website www.abramsoncenter.org/PRI.

In November, the library will move to the Center's main campus, 1425 Horsham Rd., North Wales, Pa.

The Edward and Esther Polisher Research Institute of the Madlyn and Leonard Abramson Center for Jewish Life (formerly Philadelphia Geriatric Center) serves as an umbrella under which psychologists, anthropologists, nurses, social workers, sociologists and physicians work to understand the process of aging. Established in 1959, it was the first gerontological research center in the nation to be sponsored by a geriatric facility.

The Institute is supported by major grants from the National Institutes of Health, the Alzheimer's Association, private foundations, and contributions from individuals interested in fostering research on aging. The Center is a nationally recognized leader in geriatric care, education and research.

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I N S I D E

- RESEARCHERS STUDY PALLIATIVE CARE PROGRAM
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- ENVIRONMENTAL LEXICON READY
- CULTURE CHANGE MAKES CARE PERSONAL

Caring for residents at the end of life

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The palliative care team will begin by introducing the program to all residents' families. The Center's physicians will help identify residents they believe to be near the end of life. Eligible residents and their families will be approached about enrolling in the program at no extra cost. Participants will receive the services of the palliative care team in the comfort and privacy of their living quarters, as most residents at this stage of life prefer to remain in familiar surroundings rather than be hospitalized.

The team will meet regularly to discuss each resident's needs. Family

members will be invited to the meetings. The program will include bereavement counseling for both family and staff members.

To identify key elements of success, the Polisher Research Institute's Anne Bower, Ph.D., an ethnographer and co-investigator on the study, will conduct a series of in-depth interviews with palliative care team members and observe the program in action. The researchers will then develop recommendations for the Center and other nursing homes interested in offering palliative care. ■

Your gifts to the Polisher Research Institute will help us expand our research in directions that improve the quality of life for seniors everywhere.

For information about creating a named endowment, or for other major gift opportunities, please contact our Office of Center Advancement at 215-371-1808.